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Plays by

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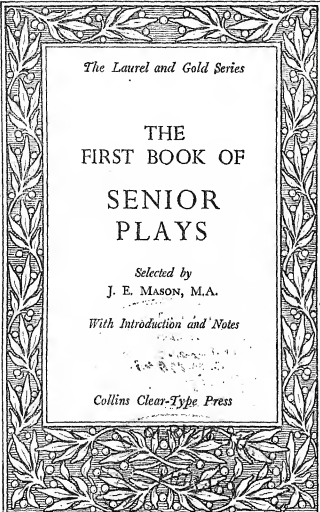
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The Laurel and Gold Series

THE
FIRST BOOK OF
SENIOR
PLAYS

Selected by
J. E. MASON, M.A.

With Introduction and Notes

Collins Clear-Type Press

First Impression, January, 1935
Second " August, 1935
Third " November, 1938
Fourth " June, 1946



32-032

*Printed in Great Britain at
the Press of the Publishers,
Cathedral Street, Glasgow*

INTRODUCTION

THE One-Act Play is a comparatively new form of dramatic technique evolved almost entirely within the last twenty-five years.

In origin it resembles the earlier dramatic interludes of Elizabethan days, such as were performed during the intervals which occurred in the performance of longer plays, or before the commencement or after the conclusion of such plays, or even on special occasions when only a short dramatic entertainment was called for.

In the early twentieth century the short play re-appears as a curtain-raiser; and when drama concerned itself so deliberately with the various social problems of the day, the shorter play was often introduced to give some form of variety or relief to the programme.

Immediately after the War the professional producer seized upon this shortened form of dramatic composition as suitable entertainment for a public already satiated with the more serious sides of life. But the One-Act Play on the professional stage was only an episode in the development of modern drama. Public taste changed; the fashion disappeared. There were also profes-

sional difficulties in the way of its continued presentation.

But play-acting has always been a social experience in which non-professional actors and actresses have loved to indulge. Even the Elizabethan Masque was frequently performed by amateurs. In fact the most popular form the Masque took was when a dramatist wrote a short ornate and often musical play specially for presentation by a number of ladies and gentlemen for the amusement and entertainment of their friends. Milton's "Comus" is an excellent example of this.

Amongst the socialising influences of the twentieth century must be counted the growth of the Amateur Dramatic Societies in the British Isles. Various groups of amateurs keenly interested in dramatic technique have performed plays from time immemorial; while schools and colleges from the days of Nicholas Udall—who, in about the year 1551, is reputed to have written and produced our first English Comedy, "Ralph Roister Doister," with his boys at Eton—have considered amateur dramatic activities almost as natural and as necessary a function as their indulgence in games. After the War the Amateur Dramatic movement in this country, always slowly increasing in popularity, spread by leaps and bounds. Men and women, and boys and girls in all classes of society began to find with what mutual joy they could engage in the production of plays. Many of these

groups have established themselves most successfully, while some have accomplished quite advanced experimental work. Not infrequently it is the amateur society that discovers and produces a play which afterwards is accepted by the professional stage.

But from the beginning the One-Act Play has proved a natural medium for the amateur dramatic society. It is shorter and therefore more easily handled for production. There is perhaps an erroneous conception that it is easier to produce, but, as we shall observe later, the One-Act Play has developed a technique of its own and can be as exacting in its demands as any other form of art. But the possibility of the inclusion of more than one play in an entertainment composed solely of One-Act Plays gave the amateur dramatic movement an outlet for its unbounded enthusiasm. For, usually speaking, it is obviously easier to give a large number of your members the opportunity of taking part in a performance, if your programme is made up of a number of One-Act Plays, than it is if you confine yourself to a single production.

But the influence of the re-discovery of the One-Act Play on the amateur dramatic movement was reciprocated, for, as the societies grew in number, their demand for plays increased ; while the custom of holding dramatic festivals among amateur societies has given a still further impetus to the writing of the shorter type of play. This en-

couragement is not necessarily wholly good. There are spurious One-Act Plays, an attempt to satisfy the popular demand for them, as there are always spurious productions when any one form of art becomes popular.

Throughout all this period of popularity the One-Act Play has developed along lines entirely its own. It is not merely a short play, a slip as it were from the larger one. Its first essential characteristic, of course, is its brevity, and this has resulted in an art of compression. There is compression in characterisation and compression in the development of incident. Everything must of necessity be cut down to its briefest essentials. The character, for instance, must be rapidly sketched in by a few lines, a short speech or a brief conversation. There is obviously not the same opportunity to develop character study as there is in the longer modern three-act or more classical five-act play. Or if the character is developed in any detail in the short play there is little time left for other characters to be built up around it. So, too, with the essential situation. In every play as a rule one finds there is some kind of struggle, some opposition between opposing forces. It may be the evil within a man's soul struggling with the good within the same character as in *Macbeth*. Or it may be the struggle between outward and conflicting forces as in the conflict which results between the armed associates of

Macbeth, and the forces of the English and the Scottish nobility who oppose him; or it may be that the struggle of the spiritual type coincides or synchronises with the struggle of a more concrete and worldly form as in the Shakespearean play already quoted. But, generally speaking, in all plays some such struggle exists. It is this essence which gives the play its dramatic quality and calls for acting to interpret it. In the full length play we notice generally a careful exposition of how the opposed forces lie towards each other when the story opens. We learn then of the development of the situation and we reach the peak of our interest in the drama when the height of the conflict is attained. This is just as true of the comedy of Malvolio in "Twelfth Night" as it is of Macbeth's tragedy. From that conflict the dramatist as a rule finds some solution for us.

But there is not time usually for this careful exposition, development and solution in the One-Act Play. The dramatist may very rapidly summarise the situation for us. He may do it in a single line or in a single speech and then move boldly to the development of the situation and its solution. Sometimes the One-Act Play opens immediately before such a situation and proceeds straight away to the solution; sometimes when the One-Act Play opens it is only the solution with which we are concerned, what has gone before we must guess or glean for ourselves, and at other

times no solution is offered unless it reaches us like a pistol shot in the last dramatic line or lingers in our minds after the play is over, only slowly revealing itself.

But there are other things besides its own technique and its encouragement of the amateur dramatic movement which the One-Act Play has contributed to modern drama.

It has, for instance, encouraged the actual writing of plays. All over the country there are amateur playwrights struggling with One-Act Plays of their own creation, many of whom would otherwise never have contemplated the art of dramatic composition, and here again these writers working often in close contact with a particular amateur dramatic society have turned to dialect form, which, when successful, has given an intimacy and directness of appeal which plays in more formal language sometimes lack.

The following plays have all been chosen because while they illustrate the tendencies and the technique of the One-Act Play they are individually worthy of dramatic presentation by either adults, juniors, experienced dramatic societies or the merest amateurs.

The prefatory note to each play is designed to stimulate general thoughts about the literary merits of the play as well as to throw out suggestions for its production. Even when no actual production is contemplated it is hoped that the

notes will help to stimulate an imaginative conception of what the play is aiming at. The notes should be read after the play.

The exercises at the end are intended to carry these various aims still further. It will be observed that while some are of a general literary or dramatic character others suggest various problems inseparable from a proper and practical study of the plays.

Before a public performance of any of the plays may be given, permission must be obtained and the appropriate fee paid to the dramatist or his agent.

J. E. M.





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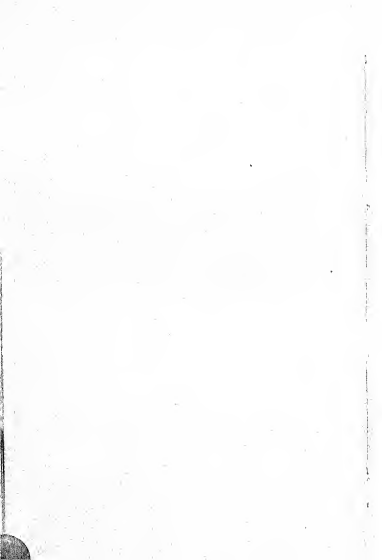


COLOMBINE

BY

REGINALD ARKELL





THIS is by no means a new or a modern play, having been first published as long ago as 1911, but it serves to illustrate a type of theme of recurring interest in all forms of drama, the Pierrot and Harlequin figures which accompany Colombine, a legacy bequeathed to English Drama by Mediæval Italian Comedy.

Notice how the unusual verse forms give an essential air of unreality to the piece and how pleasantly picturesque and appropriate the rural dialect. Some of the speeches may appear quaint, but there are often real home-truths skilfully hidden away beneath them.

The play gives golden opportunities for delightfully fantastic costumes, imaginative settings and appropriate movement, rhythm and gesture. It could be almost equally well performed by either children or adults.

Notice also that it contains two very different sets of characters, a real and an unreal world, rural roughness and fairy-like daintiness. This difference must be accentuated by dress, voice and movement. There are, in fact, two different movements running through the play, and the producer should strive to make these clear.

One note about the dresses. Do try to avoid making Colombine, Pierrot and Harlequin appear like a seaside comedy troupe.

If you have good lighting sources available, a skilful use of this medium can be utilised to contribute to the fairy-like quality of the play. Colombine can trip in with a beam of light all to herself, while Dan'l and his Old Man friend, by the help of an illuminated lantern, should be left to find their way home in the gloaming.

All applications for permission to perform this play in the British Empire (except Canada) must be addressed to :

SAMUEL FRENCH, LTD.,
26 SOUTHAMPTON STREET,
STRAND, LONDON, W.C.2.

or their authorised representatives.

For permission to perform the play in the United States of America and Canada, application must be made to :

SAMUEL FRENCH,
28 WEST 38TH STREET,
NEW YORK, U.S.A.

No performance may take place unless a written permission has first been obtained.

PROLOGUE

There are circles of green upon Cissbury Hill,
Where the Pharisees dance—so they say ;
Revelling merrily round it until
The dawn over Ditchling is grey.
And travellers lost upon Cissbury Hill—
(Pixy-led folk who stray)
Seated on toad-stools, with fairy folk sup,
But here, in Haymarket, the roadway is up.

There are circles of beech upon Cissbury Hill,
Where the leaves of a lifetime decay ;
Hiding the memories, lingering still,
Of Rome's indisputable sway.
And under the beech-leaves of Cissbury Hill,
Throbs the heart of the downland alway.
While dreaming of chieftains and warriors in woad,
You're lighting your pipe in the Charing Cross Road.



SCENE

A Roman Camp on the summit of Cissbury Beacon in the South Downs. A fairy ring occupies the foreground. All round are beech trees. The time is evening.

An old man and a boy are seen talking; both are labourers. The old man, who is seated, speaks :

Dan'l : Well, Nathan'l.

Nathan'l : Well, Dan'l.

Dan'l : There's little use in stopping here much longer.

Nathan'l : Not as I can see.

Dan'l : Like my old eyes, the sun don't grow no stronger.

Nathan'l : And I wants my tea.

Dan'l : Do ee, lad ?

Nathan'l : Ah, main bad.

Dan'l : Which means 'tis time to go, I reckons.

Nathan'l : That's a proposition as I seconds.

Dan'l : Come on then, let's be moving. Tip us yer daddle.

Nathan'l : All of a sudden you be in a mortal caddle.

I wants to hear the finish of that yarn

As you was spinning down at Tranter's Barn.
A peck of troubles it was all about.
I wants to know how everything turned out.

Dan'l: You wants your tea, that's what you
wants, my son.

Nathan'l: There's time enough for tea when
you be done.

Dan'l: Well, though 'tis little enough I read,
I sid in a story-book years ago
(Though mind, Nathan'l, there beant no need
To be letting on as I told ee so)
That all the troubles as worrits a man
Was locked in a box when the world began.

And there no doubt they'd ha' bid till now,
If the dummel soul as had got the key,
Hadn't got mixed up with a maid somehow
And gone and handed it over to she,
And what do ee fancy the maiden did?
Darn me, Nathan'l, ur lifted the lid.
And all they troubles come trooping out,
Like hens from a chicken-run might have done.
For the maiden fancied without a doubt,
They'd go back in the evening like, one by one.
But time's got to settle a few more clocks,
Afore they troubles goes back to their box.

Straight, Nathan'l, 'tis near enough
To make a methody parson swear.
And every time as I reads such stuff,

I goes so red as yon moon up there.
To think of the trouble ur brought on we—
I reckon I owes my old gal to she.

Nathan'l: Is it true, do ee think, Dan'l?

Dan'l: Mebbe, mebbe not, Nathan'l.

Nathan'l: Do ee think, Dan'l—she let out the lot?

Dan'l: Mebbe, Nathan'l, mebbe not.

Nathan'l: Sounds like a fairy story to me.

Dan'l: Mebbe, Nathan'l, mebbe, mebbe.

Nathan'l: Do ee believe in fairies, Dan'l?

Dan'l: Can't be sure as I do, Nathan'l.

Nathan'l: Well, I don't anyway, and that's fact.

Enter COLOMBINE.

Dan'l: Lawks-a-mussey, Nathan'l, be I dreaming or be I cracked?

Nathan'l: My goodness, Dan'l, I do believe as she's a fairy. . . .

Dan'l: Here, come into the shadow of these trees,

And give that clacking tongue of yourn a rest.

Nathan'l: Oh, this be more wonderful than all the things I ever guessed.

Dan'l: And it means *summat*, that you *may* depend.

Nathan'l: See, where she walks, the grass don't even bend

Beneath her feet. She be a fairy, Dan'l.

Dan'l: I wish you'd hold your clacking tongue,
Nathan'l.

COLOMBINE, *hearing a noise, pauses to listen.*

Colombine: Who's there? The daylight fades.
I cannot see.

Dan'l: You go.

Nathan'l: No, you.

Dan'l: So please you, Miss, 'tis we.

Colombine: Good evening, Sirs.

Dan'l: Our best respects to ee.
A goodish evening, to be sure, but getting dark
and cold.

Time gals like you was safe abed, if I might make
so bold.

Colombine: Old man, the night has but begun.

Dan'l: The day be done.

Colombine: The moon has scarcely risen yet.

Dan'l: The sun have set.

Colombine: The sun his wandering footsteps
stays to greet the crescent moon.

The nightjar and the nightingale will both be
singing soon.

Dan'l: Us don't set much store by nightingales
in these parts, and as for nightjars! Oh lor, us
shoot they.

Give I a linnet now,
A-sitting on a bough;

As sings his message to the sun,
And goes to sleep when day be done,
Respectable like !

Nathan'l (coming forward) :

Queer things,
These here rings
You sees in the grass
When you pass.
They say 'tis where Pharisees dances at night !
Be that right?

Colombine : Quite right ; yet once the circle
that you see,
Saw war and tumult.

Dan'l : Lawks-a-mussey me !

Colombine : The Roman legions camped on
yonder brow,
And built the road you stand on.

Nathan'l : Did they now !

Colombine : The sun would sink out yonder in
the west,
And shine upon their helmets.

Dan'l : Well, I'm blest !

Colombine : The very spot where Julius Cæsar
sat,
Lies just behind those beeches.

Nathan'l : Think of that !

Colombine : In yonder barrow treasures rare lie
hid.

Dig deep to find them.

Dan'l : Well, I never did !

Nathan'l : But when did all this
Happen, Miss ?
How many years ago,
I'd like to know ?

Colombine : Roughly two thousand, on this very
spot.

Dan'l : Lor ! What a memory you must have
got.

Colombine (to NATHAN'L) : But tell me please ;
Beneath these trees,

What travellers come, and whither bound ?

Do still these ancient heights resound

With martial music and the tramp of men ?

Nathan'l : Us gets a hurdy-gurdy now and then,
And once a clown on stilts went through the wood ;
And oh ! he could catch pennies, that he could.

Colombine : But in what fashion do you pass
your days ?

Nathan'l : I kill the time in various sorts of ways ;
Scaring the rooks as settles on the corn ;
Helping the shepherd when the lambs be born.
Talking to Dan'l about these here rings,
And wondering about a power of things
As don't concern nobody, I suppose.

But then, you must do summat, goodness knows.

Colombine : Of course. 'Tis lonely here without
a doubt.

What are the things you're wondering about
To-day ?

Nathan'l : Such things as surely never wa:

Such things as surely no-one ever does.
And yet, of nothing, for they moves so fast,
You finds as you've forgotten them at last.
Just like a dream they passes and be gone.
Just like a dream they passes

Colombine :

Yes, go on.

Nathan'l : Just like a dream, for though I thinks
a lot,

Before they're rightly thought they're clean forgot.
Though somehow, now I sits and talks to you,
I keeps remembering things I never knew.
Just like as though somebody slammed a door,
When you was going where you'd been before ;
Leaving you standing on the further side,
Wondering at what was happening inside.
Whether the folk you knew was there or not ;
Whether you really knew, and had forgot ;
Whether you'd been there once when you was small
Or whether you was never there at all.
'Tis plaguey awkerd, wondering, that it be.
And now I must be off, I wants my tea.

Exit.

Colombine : Good-bye. And think sometimes of
me.

*Rousing herself from the brown study into
which this revelation has thrown her, and
addressing DAN'L.*

Are you fond of a fight ?

Dan'l (startled) : Eh ?

Colombine : Are you fond of a fight ?

Dan'l : It all depends. Why ?

Colombine : There's going to be a fight.

Dan'l : When ? Where ?

Colombine : Very soon.

By the light of the moon.

On the very stroke of nine.

All for love of *Colombine*.

Dan'l : Shall I fetch a policeman ?

Colombine : A policeman ! Dear me, no.

Dan'l : Who's going to fight.

Colombine : Don't you know ?

Harlequin and Pierrot.

Dan'l : Never heard of they.

Colombine : Won't it be fun ?

Dan'l : Good fun

For the one as gets killed.

Colombine : But they won't kill each other.

They never do. They're *most* dependable.

Dan'l : Have um fought before ?

Colombine : Of course. Hundreds of times.

Dan'l : Silly young chaps.

Colombine : They're not silly. They're fighting for me. Don't you understand ?

Dan'l : I fought about a girl once. But only once. It was a long time ago.

Colombine : You're not romantic. Romance would die if it wasn't for fighting. Romance is fighting.

Dan'l: Then I've had quite enough romance to please me.

Colombine: All properly constituted love affairs should include a fight. Love without fighting is insipid.

Dan'l: You don't have to do the fighting. Which of 'em loves you the most?

Colombine: Why, Pierrot, of course.

Dan'l: Then why don't you marry him?

Colombine: And disappoint Harlequin? I couldn't do that.

Dan'l: When are you going to decide?

Colombine: I don't know. (*On her fingers*) This year, next year, some time, never. To-night perhaps.

Dan'l: One day they'll get tired of fighting. What then?

Colombine: Never!

Dan'l: You're sure of that?

Colombine: Oh, yes. Quite sure.

Dan'l: One of them may get killed.

Colombine: They wouldn't be so careless.

Dan'l: What should you do if one of 'em got killed by accident?

Colombine: I should be very angry. But you're very horrid to suggest such things. Why don't you go away?

Dan'l: Good-bye.

Colombine: No, stay.

Dan'l: Well, I'm fond of a fight, I must say.

Colombine : Hush ! They are coming. Quick, behind this tree.

Dan'l : Anywhere in the background's good enough for me.

Colombine : A fight, a fight ! And all for love of me.

The orchestra plays quietly the Soldiers' Chorus and snatches of other martial refrains. The two watchers betray tense excitement. HARLEQUIN and PIERROT enter arm in arm. Any differences they may have had are evidently settled. COLOMBINE looks on in astonishment.

Harlequin : Mind you, as girls go, Colombine's one of the best.

Pierrot : Ah, yes.

Harlequin : But nothing to fight about.

Pierrot (without conviction) : No.

Harlequin : And fighting's going out of fashion. There's no doubt about that.

Pierrot : Yes.

Harlequin : The whole trend of modern thought is opposed to it.

Pierrot : Yes.

Harlequin : None of the best people do it.

Pierrot : I suppose not.

Harlequin : And one must be in the movement.

Pierrot : Of course.

Harlequin : Arbitration's the thing nowadays.

Pierrot : What's that ?

Harlequin : Why, you each talk until you're out of breath, and the one with most breath wins.

Pierrot (taking a deep breath) : That seems a good idea.

Harlequin : It is.

Pierrot : But what will Colombine say if we don't fight ? She loves to watch us fight.

Harlequin : My dear chap, we must be firm. Adopt your point of view, and stick to it in the face of all opposition.

Colombine (advancing) : Aren't you going to fight ?

Pierrot (kindly) : Not to-night.

Colombine : Oh ! Why not ?

Harlequin : Well, we've got
Other fish to fry,
That's why.

Colombine : Oh ! do fight !

Pierrot : Not to-night.

Harlequin : Now, my dear girl, do listen to reason. You will admit, I suppose, that the most elementary point about a duel is to spit your opponent through the gizzard.

Colombine : Yes.

Harlequin : Well, I haven't got a gizzard, and what's the use of trying to spit a man's gizzard, if he hasn't got a gizzard to spit ? You must be reasonable.

Colombine : How do you know you haven't got a gizzard ?

Harlequin : We don't know for certain; we assume.

Pierrot : You've only to look at him to see there isn't room.

Colombine : But why the gizzard? What does it matter *where* you spit him so long as you do spit him?

Harlequin : For heaven's sake, my dear girl, don't preach such revolutionary doctrines. There is a certain etiquette to be observed, even in a battle.

Colombine (after a pause) : But it's quite simple. You spit Pierrot. He's got a gizzard, I suppose.

Harlequin : Now, listen. Pierrot consulted a phrenologist . . .

Pierrot : Soothsayer !

Harlequin : Sorry—soothsayer, who said he was born to be hung. . . .

Pierrot : Hanged !

Harlequin : Hanged, and so, of course, he doesn't want to run the risk of disappointing him.

Colombine : Very considerate, I'm sure. I think you're absolutely *horrid*, there.

Cries.

Harlequin (to *PIERROT*) : Don't waver, both together.

Harlequin and *Pierrot* : We don't care Tuppence what you think or say.

We talked the matter over, here to-day
And arbitration is the only way.

Colombine : You're frightened.

Harlequin : Don't be silly. Frightened ! Me !

Colombine : Well, who's your arbitrator going to be ?

Harlequin (taken aback) : Why yes, we must have someone, I suppose.
But who's to do it ?

Pierrot : Goodness only knows !
There's not a single person within call.

Colombine (clapping her hands) : Hurrah !
You'll have to fight, then, after all.

There is a pause, during which PIERROT and HARLEQUIN look at each other in dismay. COLOMBINE on the other hand claps her hands and pirouettes round the stage. Then HARLEQUIN sees DAN'L and drags him forward, at the same time speaking in asides.

Harlequin : What's your name ?

Dan'l : Much the same
As it's always bin,
Week out, week in,
This seventy year and more.

Harlequin : Good ! We want you to arbitrate.
You're the very man.

Dan'l : Lawks-a-mussey. I'll do it if I can.

Harlequin : There's much gold
Wealth untold !

If you only do
As I tell you to.

Dan'l : Fire away !

Harlequin : Until to-day, Pierrot and I have been in the habit of engaging in mortal combat for the hand of Colombine. Owing to the fact that up to the present neither has had the decency to get killed, and as a result of the wave of anti-militarism that has swept over the country, we have decided to fall back on arbitration. And you are the arbitrator. You understand ?

Dan'l : No !

Harlequin : Then you're very thick.

Dan'l : You speaks too quick.

And the way you keeps hopping about makes me fair mazed.

Harlequin : Now, listen. One of us is to marry Colombine, and you've to decide which it's to be. Do you see ?

Dan'l : No.

Harlequin : But it's quite simple.

Dan'l : Maybe. But how do I know which it's to be ?

Harlequin : I'll let you into a secret. It's me !

Dan'l : Oh ! And if I goes and sez 'tis you, What's yon chap in the white trousers going to do ?

Harlequin : Never mind him. He's a fool.

Dan'l : It seems it don't much matter what I say ;

I'm bound to upset one of ye either way
Oh ! very well.

Harlequin : Colombine ! Pierrot ! Gather round.

*They sit in a semi-circle ; COLOMBINE and
DAN'L in the centre.*

Dan'l : I shall catch my death of cold, sitting
on this damp ground.

*There is silence, each waiting for the other
to speak.*

Colombine : You don't seem very anxious, either
of you.

Dan'l : Who goes first ?

Harlequin : If I don't say something, and
quickly, I shall burst.

Dan'l : Then you'd best get started. (*Aside*)
How long will it take ?

Harlequin : Until it's ended.

Dan'l : Cut it short for goodness' sake.

Harlequin : Colombine ! Let me take you away
from these lonely hills. Into the heart of the
world where lies the Land of Yesterday. There are
stored all the happy hours that you have known.
You shall live them all over again, Colombine—
every one. I will lead you by secret paths, through
the dim woods of yesternight until we stand
together in the sunlight of the days that have been.
Walking backward through the years, we will
collect those dear lost delights, of which only the

memory remains. From all that has gone before, it shall be yours to pick and choose, and no Tomorrow shall throw its ominous shade before. The past shall deliver up its treasures to your hand ; regrets shall be ended, and happiness shall be sure. Will you come, Colombine ?

Colombine : No, Harlequin. The road to your Land of Yesterday is longer than you know, and there is no going back. Let us still take from the past our memories and our dreams, but do not ask for more, lest even these be denied.

Harlequin : As you will. Then it is to the future that we must turn. Colombine, far from here, set in a desert of hot sand, is a crystal, so large, that all the giants of Africa could not stir it the thickness of a hair. Peering into its depths, you may read your future to the end of time. A day, a week, a year, shall be no barrier to the vision of the mind. You may read all the riddles of the universe, and there will remain nothing that you do not know. You shall see your face as it will be when twice twenty harvest moons have waned, and fifty summer suns have set. And I alone can point you the way. Will you come, Colombine ?

Colombine : You promise much, Harlequin. It may well be that in some spot remote from the haunts of men, the Mirror of Fate yet lies hid. And you may find it. Who knows ! But this, at least, is certain ; the path will be difficult and the journey long. Would you not tire by the way,

Harlequin? I think you would. (*Pause*). And, it is not in distant deserts I would seek. In the woods of home, hearts may thrill to the eloquent silences of the night. (*HARLEQUIN rises*). All the secrets of the world might be ours, did we but care to learn the simple language of the nightingale. Across the moonlight, the shadows of the branches trace unforgettable things. Great secrets tremble on the lips of the leaves, and mortals grope vainly in the daylight for things seen most plainly in the dark.

Dan'l (coughing to draw attention to himself):
I've allus noticed, in whatever parts I med ha' bin,
A maid in love have allus got a fairish yarn to spin.
And in whatever parts I've bin, I've allus noticed,
too,

The foolish lads do take it all for gospel, that um do.
But though I've kept good notice in whatever
parts I was,

I've never heard a maid to spin a yarn like this un
does.

Ur be a marvel, that ur be; I hope as ur won't try,
When ur's tired of you two fellows here, to spin no
yarns to I;

For fools be mostly biggest fools when um be old
and grey.

And if I went along o' she, what *ud* my missus say?
Next man!

Colombine: Come, Pierrot!

Pierrot (with an effort): Colombine!

Colombine : Yes, Pierrot.

Harlequin : Go on !

Dan'l : Let's hear what you've got to say, young fellow.

Pierrot : There is nothing to say.

Colombine : Nothing to say !

Pierrot : Save that I love you, Colombine.

Colombine : And is that so small a thing, Pierrot ?

Pierrot : But I have nothing to offer you, nothing.

Colombine (softly) : Save yourself.

Harlequin : I have always said that Pierrot was master of sounding silences. The sweetest singer of unsung songs, his eloquent nothings go shrieking through the void. He scorns to desecrate the virgin purity of his foolscap with the written word. What love is that which dare not tell its love ? Come, Colombine.

Colombine : See, Harelquin, here is a beech nut. You shake it, yet there is no sound. Is it full ? Is it empty ?

Harlequin : Who can say ?

Dan'l : Likewise, young Nathan'l he picks up a match-box last week, and throws it away because there was no sound when he rattles en. (To HARLEQUIN). And what do you think ?

Harlequin : I couldn't say.

Dan'l : It was so full all the time as not to rattle at all.

Harlequin (scornfully) : Matches ! ye gods !

Let's talk of cucumbers,

Or shame the glory of this summer night

With tales of warming-pans.

Has no one here a button-hook

With which to probe the vast unsounded deeps

(*To DAN'L*) Of thy poor addled brain.

It yet may be,

In some uncharted corner of the void

That passes for thy mind,

We find a collar-stud.

Farewell !

(*Exit.*

Dan'l : Well, *he* won't come back again, that I
will be bound.

And as I be catching my death of cold, sitting on
this damp ground,

I'd best be moving. (*Rises*) Ugh ! Good-night
to ee.

Pierrot : Good-night !

Colombine (aside to DAN'L) : And, Mr. Arbitrator,
if you see

Your friend Nathan'l, say that Pierrot

Owes more to him than he will ever know.

Exit DAN'L.

Colombine : They have gone !

Pierrot : Ah !

Colombine : And the night draws on.

Pierrot : Yes.

Colombine : You are sad. Why are you sad, Pierrot ?

Pierrot : I cannot tell.

Colombine : And you are cold. Is it the night air ?

Pierrot : The wind-swept wold
Is a street of gold,
So my lady be walking there.

Colombine : Yet you are sad. See, they have gone and will not come again.

Pierrot : So love may vanish too,
And of his chain no link remain
To tell the way he flew.

Colombine : Love, as the skylark, soars into that Heaven where't fain would be.

Pierrot : And singing still, returns. Time was when you, with Harlequin, would revel till the cold grey dawn came in.

Colombine : Light loves sometime were pleasant, but to-night the face of love seems changed. No more will stray this wandering heart of mine.

Pierrot : Are you not sorry, *Colombine* ?

Colombine : Sorry for what, *Pierrot* ?

Pierrot : For loss of Harlequin.

Colombine : Harlequin is very clever but he talks of what he does not know, and promises what is not his to give. Cleverness is not everything, *Pierrot*. The mind is like a garden full of flowers, but

The heart is a little house,

With windows facing southerly ;
By which a pathway winds.
And there, behind the blinds,
We sit and wait,
Watching, waiting for what ?
We know not.

The garden is a pleasant place in summer, but when it is winter, we seek the fireside of the little house.

Pierrot : Yet you are fond of gardens and pretty flowers, *Colombine* ?

Colombine : What flowers grow
In your garden, *Pierrot* ?

Pierrot : My garden is full of the flowers,
My mother planted for me ;
Curious, old-world flowers,
Thyme, lavender, rosemary,
Planted in days gone by.
And, though no gardener I,
As the shadows fall, I tend them all ;
Watering, pruning there.
Am I happy in my lot ?
I know not.

Colombine : And there is the little house, *Pierrot*.

Pierrot : Ah, yes, there is the little house.

Do you remember when
You peeped through the pane, and then
Went on your way again ?
Out of my sight, although
I beckoned you as you passed,

And sat at my window mournfully.
But you came again at last.
And, seeing you come, I said :
" The flowers in my garden are dead,
So will she have no more of me."

Colombine : I am knocking at the door, Pierrot.
Knocking and waiting there,
For the sound of a step on the stair.
Will you open to me, Pierrot ?

PIERROT'S answer may be taken in the affirmative. As they sit together, it grows dark.

Pierrot (rising) : Come dear, and let us go,
Together, hand in hand,
Into that sun-lit land,
Where life and love are things inseparable.
Where, beneath cloudless skies,
The happy are the wise,
And none reprove the glory of a love they may not
understand.

Exeunt together.

It becomes quite dark : DAN'L and an OLD MAN pass slowly across the stage, carrying lanterns, and peering cautiously into the blackness of the night.

The Old Man : You was dreaming, Dan'l.
That's about the size of it.

Dan'l: And I tells ee I wur as wide awake as you be. Us had been sitting over-long by the clump, and all of a sudden I looks up and sees a fairy. "Lawks-a-mussey, Nathan'l," I sez, "be I dreaming or be I cracked?"

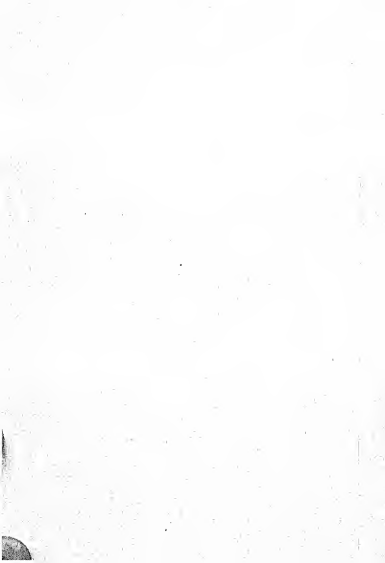
They pass off, and the curtain falls.

THE QUAKER'S CELLO

BY

CLIFFORD BAX





ON first thoughts the matter of this play may not appear a great one, but the struggle in a human soul is as much to the artist as a disturbance within an empire. The apparently narrow compass of the play illustrates the excellence of the one-act form for its studies in miniatures. This little idiosyncrasy in the Quaker's character, his inordinate love of music, is a slender thread on which to hang a story. Its picturesque use of the Quaker household illustrates its ability to obtain dramatic interest from what many would regard as the quaint and unusual aspects of life.

Again the skilful use of a gramophone will provide all the necessary musical background which the play requires.

In setting and costume, aim at the cold austerity so obvious in the Dutch interiors of many of the old painters. Much care and attention will have to be devoted to both of them. Cleanliness is next to godliness in the Quaker household. Let your setting appear neat and with a disciplined order about it. Avoid overcrowding and too much detail. In keeping with this and to assist in creating the necessary atmosphere, facial expression and movement must be of the restrained type. A change of emotion should be marked by a definite and decided movement.

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CHARACTERS

JOSIAH SMALLPIECE (30).

REBECCA (22), *his wife.*

MARY MEDDEN (50), *a neighbour.*

The action occurs on an autumn evening in 1830.

SCENE

The back-parlour of a watchmaker's shop in a small market-town. A simple and clean room.

Centre, an oak table. Here and there, three chairs of austere type. Back left, a dresser with china. Back right, in the corner, a violoncello, almost concealed under a piece of sacking.

Left, a door leading into the shop and so to the street. Back right, a door leading into the garden.

It is early evening on an autumn day in 1830.

JOSIAH is reading aloud from the Bible. REBECCA listens and sews. Their dress shows that they are Quakers.

Josiah (reading): "Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of His fierce anger.

"From above hath He sent fire into my bones . . ."

He hears the approaching strains of the town band. He pauses, listening. A gleam of pleasure comes into his eyes. REBECCA, noticing the pause, looks up.

Rebecca : What troubles thee, husband ?

Josiah : The music. The old town band.

Rebecca : Do not listen.

Josiah : They play better than they once did—
in my time.

Rebecca : Forget that time.

Josiah : That is not easy, Rebecca.

Rebecca : Thou art a Friend. Thou must fight
against the lure of the senses. To us, Josiah, the
Word of God should be more pleasurable than the
wanton minstrelsy of them that have not seen
the Light.

Josiah : Aye, aye—it should be. . . . But,
Rebecca, how hard it is to slough off the sinful
desires of our youth !

Rebecca : Read from the Book.

Josiah (*returning with difficulty to the Bible*) :
“. . . Fire in my bones, and it prevaieth against
them : He hath spread a net for my feet, He hath
turned me back. . . .”

*The music comes nearer. It perturbs JOSIAH
so much that he cannot read.*

Josiah (*in anguish*) : Rebecca ! It comes be-
tween me and the Word of God. . . .

Rebecca : Lay the Book on the table, and cover
up thine ears.

JOSIAH places the Bible on the table and,

putting his hands over his ears, continues to read.

Josiah : " He hath made me desolate and faint all the day. The yoke of my transgressions is bound by His hand. They are wreathed, and come up upon my neck : He hath made my strength to fail . . ." *Rebecca* !

Rebecca : Husband ?

Josiah : He *hath* made my strength to fail. Why was I born with this unholy hunger for music ? I cannot bend my thoughts to the Scriptures.

He closes the Bible, and strays uneasily about the room.

They are moving away. . . . The fiddler plays well. . . . They have gone down the High Street, and the Lord lighteneth my affliction.

Rebecca : Poor soul ! 'Tis a strange and a singular affliction, and those of us who have no pleasure in music should give thanks to the Lord.

Josiah : All men have their besetting sins. How mercifully am I free from avarice, pride, and fornication ; but the Friends little know, *Rebecca*—only thou knowest—how sternly I have struggled against my lust for music.

Rebecca : I will not fail thee. (*Rising and taking*

his hands) God sent me to be thy help-meet. My strength shall be added to thine.

Josiah : I am an evil-doer, a back-slider. The sound of the band, Rebecca—it pleased me.

Rebecca : Friend, thou has almost overcome thy carnal inclination. Stand firm !

Josiah : With thy help and the Lord's.

Rebecca : It is hard for thee. I know that. And maybe there are blacker sins.

Josiah : What joy I had of it—once !

Rebecca : But never since thou becamest a Friend. Five months have we lived as man and wife ; and not once has a note of thy music disturbed the godliness of our home.

Josiah : Nor shall it. Never fear that !

REBECCA goes to the dresser, takes down three plates, cups, and saucers, and puts them on the table.

REBECCA (listening) : Praised be the Lord—they have passed out of hearing.

Josiah : Amen.

A pause. JOSIAH glances longingly at his 'cello. REBECCA sees the glance.

Rebecca : Mary Medden is coming.

Josiah : A good woman, but stern. I will kindle

the bonfire before it dies down. Last night the leaves fell in their multitudes.

Rebecca : It will comfort thy heart.

JOSIAH glances again at the 'cello.

Josiah : A rich, deep note, a lovelier note than ever comes from the fiddle !

Rebecca : Do not think of it, friend.

Josiah : I must not, I must not ! . . . Ah, when I was a lad and learned my notes, how little I thought of the tribulation which they would bring down upon me !

The bell in the shop rings.

Rebecca : Mary Medden. . . .

Josiah : I will let her in, and go round to the bonfire by the back way.

He goes out, left. REBECCA prepares the table.

Rebecca : Poor soul, poor soul. . . .

Enter left, MARY MEDDEN : middle-aged, a good woman but implacable.

God bless thee, Mary Medden.

Mary : God bless thy house. There is a dark look in the eyes of Josiah Smallpiece, and maybe thy house is in need of a blessing.

Rebecca : Pray, Mary Medden, sit down. . . . What should trouble Josiah ? Our trade prospers. There is no-one within forty miles, they say, who can mend a watch or a clock as he can.

Mary : To hide the truth is to tell a falsehood.

Rebecca : To hide the truth ?

Mary : He is troubled in spirit. Bid him unburden his mind at the meeting on Sunday.

Rebecca : Mary Medden, he is a good man.

Mary : What has come over thee, friend ? No man is truly good.

Rebecca : Thou art right to rebuke me.

Mary : Tell me the truth, then. Is it not his old trouble—his wicked pleasure in music ?

Rebecca : Let him go slowly. His music meant more to him than we others can understand.

Mary : Dost thou love him ?

Rebecca : For life.

Mary : Dost thou wish his soul to be acceptable in the eyes of the Almighty ?

Rebecca : What else ?

Mary : Do not let thy love weaken him. When he became a Friend, he should have put away childish things. . . . Aye, his music-instrument ! He must not waver. He must give all. And it is thy duty to help him. Rebecca Smallpiece, if thou lovest thy husband in holiness of spirit,

thou wilt remove from him the means of back-sliding.

Rebecca : His 'cello ?

Mary : It is there still. It should not be there. Thou knowest well that the Friends regard music as a snare of the Evil One.

Rebecca : What harm can it do—his 'cello ? On the day when we were " called " in the Meeting House, he put it where it now stands. He placed a covering over it so that his eyes might not stray. Look for thyself, friend ; it is dusty. It has never been touched.

Mary : Do away with it altogether.

Rebecca : And tear out his heart ?

Mary : The wickedness of his heart.

Rebecca : Poor soul !

Mary : He must destroy that instrument. Hast thou a hammer ?

Rebecca : Mary Medden !

Mary : Bring it out and lay it upon the dresser.

REBECCA takes a hammer out of the dresser-drawer.

Do not weep, child. Should we not always be mindful of Eternity ? He must cleanse his heart if he would see the Light.

Rebecca : Sh !

Enter JOSIAH, back.

Josiah : If supper is ready, let us eat.

Rebecca : It is ready.

They stand at the table.

Josiah : The Lord sanctify this humble meal

Rebecca and Mary : Amen.

They sit down and begin their supper.

Josiah (to MARY) : Thy tall clock, I trust, is keeping true time ?

Mary : As true as the coach from London. I have not forgotten that I owe thee eight shillings, friend, for thy work upon it.

Josiah : Let us think no more of the money.

Mary : Thou shalt have it come Friday.

A pause.

Josiah : That hamner . . . I never left it there. . . . It should lie in the drawer.

Mary : Friend, in all loving kindness, I would speak to thee for the good of thy soul.

Josiah (to REBECCA) : Thou hast told Mary Medden of my tribulation ?

Rebecca : She has known of it for a long time.

Josiah : My love of music, my terrible love of music. . . .

Mary : Why dost thou keep that remembrance of thy sin ?

Josiah : My 'cello ? What harm can it work now that it is for ever silent ?

Mary : To keep it is to keep the temptation.

Josiah : Ten years—I have had it ten years.

Mary : Thrust it away, friend.

Josiah : Aye. . . . Many times I have said to Rebecca, " We must part with it. I must never see it again." But the flesh was weak, and I have put off the hour of separation.

Mary : God requires everything.

Josiah : Ten years—a long time.

Mary : The Friends forbid music. Thou knowest that.

Rebecca : There has been no music in this house—none.

Josiah : I can say truly that I have not offended.

Mary : Thou hast acquaintances in London . . .

Josiah : My brother is there.

Mary : Send it to him by the coach, and bid him sell the instrument.

Rebecca : The money we could give to the poor.

Josiah : Sell it, sell it ?

Mary : When the coach passes on Thursday.

Rebecca : Then thy conscience will be at ease.

Josiah : We must not sell it !

Rebecca : Josiah !

Josiah : We cannot—we dare not—sell it.

Mary : How terrible is thy lust, friend ! If

thou wilt not sell that abomination, then wilt thou destroy it?

Josiah: Destroy?

Mary: Or if thy hand be too weak, then shalt thou permit thy sister in God to do what thyself shouldst do. The hammer!

Josiah: Smash it—break it to pieces?

Mary (to REBECCA): Give me the hammer.

Josiah: No! . . . Not *that* way. . . . Mary Medden, look in thine own conscience. To sell it would be wickedness. Then should we set up temptation in the path of another whose frailty is greater than mine. But do not mistake me. The Lord in His bountiful mercy hath given me power to do that which is necessary in His sight.

Mary: What wilt thou do?

Josiah: The Light is within me. I will make the sacrifice. I will make a burnt offering unto the Lord.

Mary (suppressing a movement in REBECCA): Hush, hush!

Josiah: I will take this accursed joy, this symbol of my unworthiness, and will place it upon the smoking leaves and branches, and there it shall burn—there it shall be destroyed so utterly that no other soul shall ever take sensual delight by laying the bow to it. Aye, the bow also shall burn—the bow (*fingering it*), the bow. There shall be nothing left of them but ashes, and nothing left of that lust for music which comes between me and my God.

He has thrown off the sacking.

Oh, that I had not eyes to appraise it, ears to remember the evil that is within it! . . . I was a lad of twenty . . .

Mary: The Lord strengthen thy soul!

Josiah: We gathered for practice, after the day's work, in an attic by candlelight. . . .

Rebecca: Do not remember it!

Josiah: Nay, or my strength may fail me.

He shoulders the 'cello.

Rebecca, open the door.

REBECCA *holds open the door, back.*

It shall burn, and the past shall go up in a mighty flame.

He goes out, back.

REBECCA and MARY *stand for a few moments in silent prayer.*

Mary: There will be great joy in the Meeting House.

Rebecca: Mary! I know what thou dost not know—what none of the Friends know—how innocently he made music in the past, and the

bitterness of his tribulation now. To burn it—to hear that which he loved for so long bursting and crackling like common firewood.

Mary : He is doing what God demands.

Rebecca : Does God demand it? Does He—does He?

Mary : The senses are the enemies of the soul.

Rebecca : Aye, he is doing what must be done. . . . But my heart aches for the sinner in the hour of his testing, and I dread the black melancholy that will oppress him when he turns his eyes to that corner and sees that it is empty. .

MARY picks up the sacking and folds it neatly.

Mary : Put a chair in the corner. And lay the Word of God upon it!

REBECCA places a chair where the 'cello had stood, and lays the Bible upon it.

Rebecca : May it give him strength to resist the demons of memory.

Mary : Amen. . . . Listen!

Rebecca : What do you hear?

Mary : Nothing. . . . It is a great piece of wood. If he were burning it, we should hear the noise of its destruction.

Rebecca : Maybe he is building up the fire.

MARY goes to the window.

Mary : And nothing to see. No light, no glow.

Rebecca : He will do it.

Mary : I am sorely afraid for him. He will put off the day of reckoning. He will say that the fire had gone out, and he will bring back the cause of all his unhappiness.

Rebecca : Come, finish thy supper. . . . I cannot eat.

Mary : Wouldst thou place a sharp knife in the hand of an infant ? Why, no matter how grievously the child were to wail for it, thou wouldst keep the knife out of his grasp. And so shouldst thou act with Josiah Smallpiece. Here is occasion not for lamentation but for joy.

The strains of the town band become audible.

Rebecca : And that—that again—to torment him !

Mary : Aye, truly the Lord is laying a heavy affliction upon His servant.

The band comes nearer.

Rebecca : Why must they come this way just now—why, why ? He will hear it. He does hear it.

Mary (at the window) : No light. He has failed.

Enter JOSIAH, back.

A long pause.

Rebecca : Is it done ?

Josiah : I had not the heart to burn it.

Rebecca : Josiah !

Josiah : God did not require so much of me. . . .

Mary : God requires everything ! Friend, friend, wrestle again with the Prince of Darkness. Do not listen to the evil counsel which he has whispered within thy soul. Where hast thou put the accursed thing ? Give me the hammer, and I will deliver thee from this bondage of sin.

Josiah : Put down the hammer. . . . I dug a pit in the soft earth. I have buried that which I went forth to destroy, buried it, buried it. There shall it lie for ever, till the Day of Judgment, dead and silent. . . .

Mary : Let us humbly give thanks to the Lord.

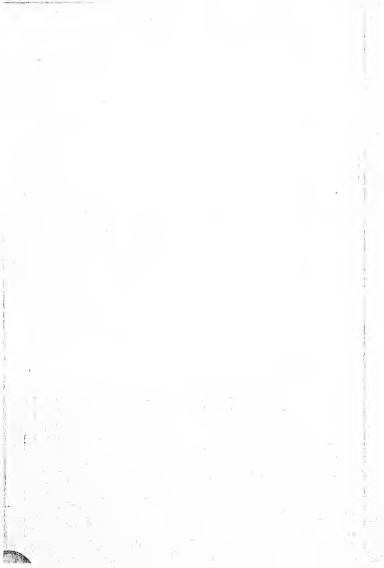
They stand in silent prayer.

The town band outside passes the house, and the sound of it gradually fades away.

THE TALE OF A ROYAL VEST

BY

FRANCIS ROSKRUGE



THIS is an interesting piece because it illustrates modern burlesque in the fashion of the old mime or mummer's play. Mumming is still revived on certain special occasions in several parts of the country.

As the author's prefatory note points out, the success of any dramatic presentation of the play will depend upon the artistic co-operation between the Teller of the Tale and the Mimms or Mimmers, who have to act the appropriate parts of the Teller's story. But this in turn will depend upon a proper use of gesture, movement and facial expression. Because the players cannot accompany their acting with words of their own a certain amount of exaggerated movement will be necessary. Their acts will have to speak for them. And for those who are beginning to learn to act such practice will be good; because while it relieves them from the necessity of speaking it enables them to concentrate on bodily movement, a most essential quality in acting, and one which many of us are inclined to forget. The use of a full length mirror, such as is favoured by ballet masters and mistresses, will be found most helpful in rehearsals.

It is obvious that in producing the play the personality of the Teller of the Tale should not be allowed to obtrude itself after the prologue has

been read. In fact from the beginning of scene on until the concluding sentence of the play it would be well if the audience were conscious of nothing of the Teller but his voice.

The author has given useful hints on the making of the costumes and properties. But there is a real opportunity in costume design here for colourful dressing. Cheap calicoes in the primary colours with paper cut-outs superimposed, can be made most effective. The bold colouring of the playing-card is the result to be aimed at. While in make-up there is room for a certain amount of exaggeration.

A suitable record and a gramophone will relieve you from any difficulties experienced in providing the necessary fanfare of trumpets.

The stage should be brilliantly lit.

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LONDON :

H. F. W. DEANE & SONS,

THE YEAR BOOK PRESS LTD.,

31 MUSEUM STREET, W.C.1.

BOSTON, U.S.A. :

THE BAKER INTERNATIONAL PLAY BUREAU

A BURLESQUE MIME

This MIME—FANTASY—BURLESQUE—call it what you will—was originally written as a MIMIC-CHARADE, the word being "Laundry-maid" (Lawn dry-maid). It has now been slightly altered, and the setting simplified to enable it to be played in its present form—a BURLESQUE MIME.

The "TALE" is to be read aloud by "The Teller of the Tale," and as it is read is to be acted in dumb show by the various characters. It must, therefore, be read clearly, fairly slowly, and at certain points time must be allowed for the necessary "business" on the part of the characters. So select your Reader carefully, for a great deal depends on how the Tale is told!

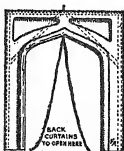
The "COSTUMES." As the period is "Once Upon a Time," and the little drama takes place in "CHARADIA," a great deal of latitude is permissible; in fact, any costumes may be worn if they are pleasing to the eye and capable of "making a pretty picture." The period known loosely as "The Middle Ages" is perhaps the most suitable. The costume of the "Teller of the Tale" should be in keeping with that of the other players.

The "SETTING" should be as simple as possible. No "scenery" is necessary; a stage hung with

plain coloured curtains at sides and back is perhaps the most suitable, the necessary entrances being arranged between the curtains. Of course, if suitable scenery is available it may be used instead of curtains.

The following setting will probably be found the most satisfactory, entailing a minimum amount of scene-shifting and the shortest waits between the various scenes.

Get your handy-man (or woman!) to make out of wooden battens and painted strawboard an arched doorway and window, something after the style of those shown in the sketch. These must be



ARCHED DOORWAY, OF WOOD BATTENS (SHOWN IN DOTTED LINES) AND PAINTED STRAWBOARD OR CANVAS



WINDOW, MADE AS DOORWAY. WHITE TAPES FOR GLASS-FRAMES

quite separate, as it may be necessary to remove the arch, leaving the window in place.

SCENE I.—Plain curtains at back and sides of stage. Arch at back on right, and window at back

on left; curtains arranged to permit their being drawn apart at door and window.

SCENE II.—The same. Back curtains closed behind arch and window. Clothes-line stretched from arch to down extreme left of stage. Wash-tub, etc., down stage right. In the "flies" directly above the clothes-line is hidden the "Black Bird." The bird is suspended by a strong black thread, carried to some suitable place off-stage and so arranged that it can be lowered directly in front of the Lady Marjorie's face as she goes to the clothes-line.

SCENE III.—Remove arch, or bring back curtains in front to cover it. Open the curtains behind window. Set up the "Royal Bed" at back of stage left, so that the King, when sitting up, can just see through the window.

The bed can be made on two chairs, one at the head and the other at the foot, with a stool between. Both chairs should be draped, and the one at the head should be high-backed, and the "Royal Arms" should be fixed above it by battens hidden by drapery.

SCENE IV.—Remove or cover window. Remove stool from bed, and set up the two chairs (on dais, if possible) as Thrones at centre of stage at back. A few trophies of "property" swords, axes, shields, etc., hung at back and sides of stage, will add to the effect.

LIST OF PROPERTIES, ETC., REQUIRED

FOR THE TELLER OF THE TALE.

Large ornamental leather (or imitation) book cover, to hide the printed copy when reading.

FOR THE KING.

Crown.

Money-bags. Paper bags labelled GOLD, stuffed with paper, tied, and sealed with large red seals.

Coins.

Dressing-gown.

Pyjamas.

Nightcap. Red "stocking" type suggested.

FOR THE SENTINEL.

Halberd.

Toy trumpet.

FOR SIR NANCE.

Four "Tabards." The first should be cut to hang down front and back, simply having hole cut for his head. The others may be "dummies," hanging down in front only. Device painted on each.

1st Tabard. Lord Chamberlain. Device, two brooms crossed.

2nd Tabard. Master of Household. Device, two keys crossed.

3rd Tabard. Groom of Bedchamber. Device, two bedroom slippers, surmounted by a candlestick.

4th Tabard. Lord Privy Purse. Device, two money-bags, tied and sealed.

Quill pen.

Inkhorn.

"Parchment" scroll.

"Golden" Noble.

Purse.

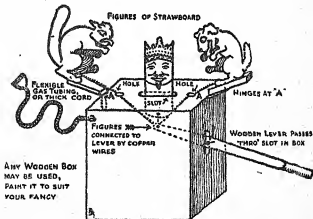
} All carried in waistbelt.

FOR QUEEN.

Crown.

Large wooden spoon gilded.

Large cardboard "vest button."



"THE DRY-CLEANER".

FOR LADY MARJORIE.

Large jar labelled "PUREST HONEY. MADE IN
ARCADY."

FOR THE FLEMING.

"Dry-cleaner." May be made from wooden
box; figures painted and cut out of card-
board.

Dummy "head," made from linen-bag or old
pillow-case stuffed with paper, face to be
painted, and Fleming's cap pinned on when
required.

FOR THE ANCIENT MAID.

Small wash-tub.

Stool. (May also be used between two chairs to
make the King's bed.)

Bowl. To be placed in wash-tub, with hot water
and lather.

Lux.

Hot water.

Four vests.

1st. Ordinary size.

2nd. Small.

3rd. Still smaller. (Large doll's vest, or cut
roughly out of any suitable material.)

4th. Doll's vest.

OTHER PROPERTIES.

Clothes-line.

Black Bird. Any suitable toy bird may be bought; but quite a good "Bird" may easily be made from a few bits of wood, black cloth, a little copper wire bound in orange cloth for claws, and a few black fowl's feathers for wings and tail. Care must be taken to put a good wire hook in the beak to hold the vest when "spirited away."

The Bird must be suspended by a long black thread (carpet thread is best) long enough to be worked from the wings, or behind.

"Royal Arms." May be used on the chair at head of bed. This chair will then form the King's throne in the final scene. Or the "Arms" may simply be fastened to the back-cloth in these scenes. They may be painted and cut out of cardboard.

Swords, axes, spears, shields, etc., for decorating the Throne Room. Painted and cut out of cardboard or strawboard. Prepared as "trophies" beforehand, they can quickly be put in place.

Arched doorway for use in Scenes I. and II.
(If desired.)

Arched window for use in Scenes I., II. and III.
(If desired.)

Made from wooden battens and painted strawboard, or canvas.

The thrones in the last scene are more effective if raised on a dais.

Long "robes" or trains draped from the shoulders of their Majesties also add to the effect in this scene.

CHARACTERS

THE KING.

THE SENTINEL.

SIR NANCE.

THE QUEEN.

LADY MARJORIE.

THE FLEMING.

THE ANCIENT MAID.

THE TALE

PROLOGUE

The Teller of the Tale reads the Prologue from the centre of the stage in front of the curtain.

The King was 'mongst his money-bags,
Counting out his gold ;
The Queen was eating honey,
As she's done from days of old ;
The Maid—ah ! here's the tragedy !—
Was hanging out the clothes,
When by came a Blackbird,
And . . . from just beneath her nose !

SCENE I

THE COURTYARD OF THE CASTLE

Curtain is drawn.

THE TELLER OF THE TALE *stands left of stage, just in front of curtain, and reads in a clear, slow voice.*

THE SENTINEL *paces the lawn, the KING is seen through window counting his gold.*

KING *holds up large coin, frowns, and beckons*
SENTINEL.

SENTINEL *salutes and hurries off left.*

Once upon a time there did rule in the Kingdom of CHARADIA a King, and they did call him "PENURIAS THE CLOSE," for he was exceeding fond of his money-bags. Now, it fell that on a summer's day the King was in his Counting House, and as was his wont he was counting out his gold. And he did find amongst the golden coins one of baser metal—and he was exceeding wroth. And straightway he did summon the Sentinel that did keep guard upon the Lawn without, and bade him tell Sir Nance, the Lord Keeper of the Privy Purse, that the King did desire an audience forthwith. And the Sentinel returned in haste and with him Sir Nance, much perturbed, for he wot well His Majesty's shortness

Re-enter SENTINEL, escorting SIR NANCE.

in the temper. Now, Sir Nance did wear upon his person, in readiness to change with speed, four surcoats or tabards, each emblazoned with the Arms of his high offices, and he acquired great skill as a turncoat. For not only was he the Lord High Chamberlain, but Master of the Household, Groom of the Bedchamber, and Lord Keeper of the Privy Purse; all Offices of great honour—but the salary was—Nix.

SIR NANCE *displays each tabard as name is read, throwing it over left shoulder to show next on list. The last must be the Privy Purse.*

KING *enters through arch, very wroth, holding out "brass farthing."*

Then to him came the King, and did upbraid him, crying out that the fault lay with him in that some knave of a taxpayer had passed into the Royal Coffers a brass farthing, pretending it was gold. So, to appease His Majesty, and eke to save his own neck, Sir Nance did most unwillingly take from his own purse a Golden Noble, which he did exchange for the base coin of brass. The King was something soothed that he had wangled the good gold out of Sir Nance, but to him he saith, "I fain would speak with thee anent certain affairs of this my Castle." Whereat Sir Nance did right quickly change his livery, and stood before the King arrayed as Master of the Household.

SIR NANCE *quickly changes tabards, leaving displayed that of Master of the Household.*

And the King made great ado concerning the expenses of the Court, saying his Queen, who was daughter to the King of Hearts, did bid fair to empty the Royal Coffers with the cost of the honey she did eat, and her other extravagances, while he, the King, must fain content himself with Royal

Underwear that did a button lack. And while he yet held forth upon his many grievances, upon the Lawn came Queen Honeydew, and in attendance on her was the Lady Marjorie, the Maid of Honour in Constant Waiting who, even as did Sir Nance, filled many posts of much honour but small profit; for she was likewise Mistress of the Much Worn Robes and Guardian of the Royal Honey Pots.

*Enter right the QUEEN and LADY MARJORIE.
The QUEEN has a large gilt wooden spoon.
LADY MARJORIE holds in her arms a large jar
of "honey."*

And the Lady Marjorie did hold within her hands a jar of great size bearing the legend, "PUREST HONEY—MADE IN ARCADY," and from this jar the Queen did oftentimes help herself; but no heed paid she to the King, continuing in converse with the Maid. The King did greet her, asking, "What cheer?" and "Had her dreams been sweet after her honey possets?" But she, with nose atilt, did speak but to the Lady Marjorie. Of the delights and dainties of her Royal Father's Court she spoke, and told how her Mother, the Queen of Hearts, did make most tempting tarts on every summer's day. Once more the King essayed to gain speech with her and, bowing low, addressed her thus: "Madame, I prithee give me heed. This new-fangled garment that thou dost make me

wear next to my Royal Skin, and which thou callest 'A VEST,' doth of a truth a button lack, and I fain would have it set to rights, and that right soon, for verily a plaguey draught doth cause me dole." "Sir," cried the Queen, "this many a day have I prayed you to have that Vest washed by the Royal Laundry-maids, but ye would not. So let it now be done forthwith, and the button it doth lack can at that same time be replaced." "I'faith," cried the King, "what haste is there for washing? I have but worn the Vest since last year's fall, and 'tis now scarce early summer. Moreover, as thou dost know full well, it is the only garment of its kind within Our Realm, and should it to the wash be sent, then must I lie abed for two whole days or more the while 'tis washed and hung in sun to dry."

"Hoity toity!" cried the Queen. "Two days abed will do thee no harm, and perchance give some little ease to thy long-suffering subjects! But be that as it may, unless that Vest be washed, straight to my Father's Court do I return—and THAT, my Lord, is THAT." Then was the King much perturbed, and he did summon the Lord Chamberlain, whereat Sir Nance in haste did

SIR NANCE displays the Lord Chamberlain's tabard.

fittingly array himself, and they did gloomily

consult together, with many a frown and much biting of nails.

At length Sir Nance did whisper in the Royal Ear, and the King did sadly nod assent. Whereat Sir Nance seized pen and parchment scroll, and in haste did write a Proclamation . . . "OYES!

SIR NANCE takes from his belt pen, inkhorn and parchment.

OYES! OYES! To all and sundry Our Good Subjects, GREETING! Now, whereas 'tis thought by some that a certain Garment, to wit the Royal Vest, doth stand in need of sweetening, WE HEREBY do decree that any person who can devise the means to have the Royal Garment cleansed within the space of one night's slumber, shall reap a rich reward."

SIR NANCE kneels while the KING signs.

PENURIAS.

REX.

And then, with deep obeisance, Sir Nance did cry, "Sign, please, Your Majesty," and the King did make his mark thereon as he was bid.

SENTINEL goes off left. Sound of trumpet off.

And the Sentinel, at the Lord Chamberlain's bidding, went forth to have the Proclamation made. And scarce had the echoes of the Heralds' trumpets died away when the Sentinel returned and cried,

SENTINEL *re-enters left. Salutes.*

"A stranger doth crave admittance at the Postern Gate, but, My Liege, he hath with him some strange machine the like of which hath never yet been seen."

"My Lord Chamberlain," saith the King, "admit this fellow an it seem fit to thee, but mark ye well the strange engine that he doth bear, lest it work evil to Our Royal Person."

LORD CHAMBERLAIN *goes off left.*

Then while yet they waited on the Lawn the Lord Chamberlain did return, and with him a sorry knave, bearing a most weird and fearsome machine.

Re-enter left LORD CHAMBERLAIN followed by the FLEMING carrying "dry-cleaner." He places this down stage centre. Kneels.

The King in haste, fearing some ill was meant him, gat him quickly to the hither side of the Queen, crying, "'Tis some vile plot to destroy Us

KING runs and crouches behind QUEEN, who is standing down stage right.

in Our Castle Grounds!" But the Queen cried scornfully, "Grammercy! Play the man!" But turning to the Lord Chamberlain she saith, "Who is this fellow; and what magic doth he seek to work with this most evil-looking engine?"

"Madame, of a verity I trow that he doth mean no ill," answered the Lord Chamberlain. "He doth avow he is a native of the Flemish Lowlands, shipwrecked upon our shores some years ago. I do marvel that Your Majesty's liege subjects destroyed him not, but perchance they did deem him scarce worth the pains. His name, he saith, is Achille le Sec, the machine he calleth a 'Dry Cleaner,' and 'tis in answer to His Majesty's most gracious Proclamation that he hath come to display the marvellous powers thereof."

KING comes centre and cautiously examines machine. FLEMING shows how it works, etc.

At this the King was somewhat soothed, and coming forth he did examine well the strange machine, and plied the stranger with many a question as to how it worked, and what meant the fearsome animals with which it was bedecked.

Then saith the Fleming, "My Liege, an it please

you, these are but the charges on your Royal Arms, and placed hereon to do Your Majesty some little honour. This is no pretty toy. It will, I do avow, cleanse Your Majesty's Royal Vest, and that without removal from Your Majesty's Most Royal Person."

Then cried the King in anger, "Knave, beware! Dost dare suggest that aught We wear upon Our Royal Person *can* stand in need of thy vile dust-pump? Sirrah, have a care, or I will have thee shortened by a head. Get hence, and take with thee thy black magic!"

But the Queen saith quickly in his ear, "Penurias, 'tis the pump for thee, or bed, or failing either I do take my leave as I did warn thee heretofore!"

SIR NANCE *changes tabards.*

KING and SIR NANCE *exit right.*

Then did the King call the Groom of the Bed-chamber, and all unwilling, muttering in his beard, went straightaway to prepare him for the test. And while the King was yet away the Queen and Lady Marjorie did ply the stranger with many a question as to the strange engine, wishing to learn its utmost powers. And he did stuff them up most mightily, and made them e'en believe Spring Cleaning, that dread ceremony, could now be made a pleasant recreation. The King, now

Re-enter right KING and SIR NANCE. KING still wears his crown, but he has put on a gaudy dressing-gown. For the "test" the FLEMING works the handle of the "pump." SIR NANCE uses the flexible "suction," putting it inside the dressing-gown, etc. Eventually all start sneezing.

•

fittingly arrayed, once more returned and, smiling somewhat sourly, did submit him to the test. And when at length the stranger did declare that he could do no more, both King and Queen into the Castle went, that privily they might examine the result.

KING and QUEEN exit right.

And the while he waited, Achille le Sec, with face aglow, did count the rich reward that his mind's eye could see almost within his grasp.

Re-enter QUEEN right.

In a short space returned the Queen alone, and to the Sentinel she cried, "Arrest that lying knave and, ere the sun be set, off with his head. The fragments of his vile machine shall feed the

SENTINEL seizes FLEMING and drags him off stage left.

Laundry fires ; it hath no power to cleanse as he did falsely claim ; all that it could encompass was to rend yet another button from the Royal Vest.

QUEEN holds up large cardboard "button" in full view.

The King is even now abed, and on the morrow's morn the Royal Laundry-maids shall, in sweet spring water, cleanse the Royal Vest."

Re-enter SENTINEL left, holding aloft "head" of FLEMING.

CURTAIN

SCENE II

THE SAME

'Twas on the day that followed after these strange happenings that "all in the Castle Garden fair" the Royal Washtub was set up and all made ready for the Great Day of Cleansing.

MAID stands behind tub set on stool down stage right. In tub is bowl with little water and much lather; also three small vests of decreasing size, the smallest a doll's vest.

The Ancient Maid of the Laundry stood ready at the Tub, and to her came the Lady Marjorie

LADY MARJORIE enters left, holding vest at arm's length. This should be an ordinary vest.

bearing at arm's length the Royal Vest, the which she handed to the Ancient Maid, and then stood by to keep both watch and ward.

And by their looks 'twas plain to see that both were sore perturbed, for right well they wist that should aught of ill befall the Royal Vest they were in evil case.

Then saith the Lady Marjorie to the Maid, "I prithee take great heed, for I have oft heard tell that garments made from fleece of sheep do at times of washing fall beneath a spell, and have e'en been known to shrink and wither into very nothingness."

"Grammercy!" quoth the Maid, "but was not this garment guaranteed unshrinkable by the Ladies of the Guild of Little Woolly Makers, who did weave it for His Majesty?"

"As to that I know not," replied the Lady Marjorie. "But is the water pure that thou hast within the Tub, and is it heated to the right degree?" To which the Maid saith, "In very sooth 'tis water from the Holy Well on Skidden's Hill, and of a warmth most comfortable to the hand."

Then saith the Lady Marjorie, "In so far good. That should give pause to any who seek to work Black Magic. But what strange stuff is this that maketh the water to froth and rise like very foam on ocean's shore?"

"Alack, I do mistrust it greatly," quoth the Maid. "I fain would use the ashes from a fire of wood, as hath ever been my custom, but the Queen did strictly charge me to prepare this evil smelling stuff she calleth SOAP, and on my peril I must use but that alone to cleanse the Royal Vest!"

"Then let us bandy words no longer," saith the Lady Marjorie, "but straightway put it to the test." And she did then cross herself, saying,

" Saint Blanche, the patron Saint of Laundry-maids,
be with the Royal Garment in the Tub ! "

LADY MARJORIE *crosses herself.*

And then the Ancient Maid did pound and
maul the Vest as was her wont, and anon did hold
it up on high to see if it perchance did withstand

MAID "*washes*" vigorously, then holds up
second size vest.

the strain . . . and both were stricken dumb with
fear and sorrow, for 'twas plain to see the Vest
was smitten with a woeful shrinkage. Again they

MAID holds up third size vest.

plunged it in the water's foam and yet again . . .
but ever the Vest did shrink before their very eyes.

MAID holds up smallest doll's vest.

And then the Lady Marjorie, well nigh afaint
with fear, cried out, " I prithee give it me before
it vanish altogether ; I will e'en hang it on the
line, perchance Our Lady and the good God's
sunshine will drive out the evil spirit and restore

LADY MARJORIE *takes vest and goes up stage*

to hang it on the line, turning her back on audience.

it to its former size. But if indeed it be not so, why then, alack, we are in very truth undone ! ”

BIRD is lowered from above in front of LADY MARJORIE. Whilst appearing to struggle with it, she hooks vest to bird's beak. Bird is then pulled up out of sight.

But even as she made to hang it on the line came from the Eastern skies a HUGE BLACK BIRD, with beak and talons all aflame, and seized the Royal Vest from out her hands, and bore it right away.

And the two women, stricken with a mighty panic, did fall all fainting on the greensward.

LADY MARJORIE and MAID fall in a "faint" centre.

CURTAIN



SCENE III

THE ROYAL BEDCHAMBER

KING in pyjamas and crown sits up in bed at back. Bed placed so that he can just see out of window. GROOM OF BEDCHAMBER and SENTINEL in attendance.

So three days passed, and all that weary time the King did lie abed, and he was very wroth. For he would fain have dressed and hied him to his Counting House, but the Queen forbade it, since he had no Vest, and the month of May was not yet out.

And the Groom of the Bedchamber besought him that he would command the Ladies of the Guild of Little Woolly Makers to make him yet another Vest like unto that which by Black Magic was spirited away. But he would not, saying that the Royal Coffers could not bear so great extravagance. Then saith Sir Nance, and as he spake he smiled behind his hand, "But if Your Majesty will but impose just one more trifling Tax, say some few pence each time the Ladies change the fashion of their skirts, then will the bill be paid in full, and perchance a little over."

"Marry," saith the King, "thou art a man after mine own heart. Send thou the Order to the Guild forthwith, and have the Tax proclaimed this very hour."

SENTINEL goes off left. Sound of trumpets off.

QUEEN enters right.

Then came the Queen into the Bedchamber, and she did wring her hands and, crying "Woe is me!" told how the Lady Marjorie "all distraught" had fled into the Enchanted Wood. "Methinks," quoth she, "that Flemish knave, ere yet he lost his head, did work Black Magic on us all; for thou hast lost thy Vest and I my faithful handmaiden, and none in all the Court can make such toothsome honey-possets."

"In very sooth to get another Maid is but a simple matter," saith the King. "Let it be known to all the post is vacant, and the salary beyond the Dole to those who will not work, and maidens will come flocking. Choose ye the one whose face is fairest. Then ere the first month's pay be due, we will promote her to some higher post . . . a post that doth command much honour but no pay. So shall we gain rather than suffer loss."

And while they yet did converse arose a great ado without the Castle, and gazing through the

lattice they did see the Lady Marjorie in the

*LADY MARJORIE can be seen through window
at back struggling with bird, which she grasps
by the neck.*

Enchanted Wood, and even as they gazed she struggled with and did o'erpower the GREAT BLACK BIRD that held within its beak the Royal Vest.

*LADY MARJORIE dances in right, bird in one
hand, full size vest in other.*

And straightway to the Royal Bedchamber came, all dishevelled, the Lady Marjorie, but her face was alight with gladness, and in one hand she tightly grasped the fearsome Bird, now dead, and with the other hand aloft she waved the Royal Vest, and blithely told she of her triumph o'er the powers of darkness.

Then did the Queen take the Vest, and lo, it was no longer shrunken but had regained its former ample size.

*QUEEN takes vest and holds it aloft, then
leads dance round room, all joining in except
the KING, who tries to seize vest each time it
comes near him.*

And they all rejoiced exceedingly, dancing with

glee around the Royal Bedchamber the while the King, with outstretched hands, did vainly strive to seize the Royal Vest.

And when at length the King did hold the Vest within his hands, he scarce could contain himself for very joy, but made as if to leap straightly from the Royal Bed, whereat both Ladies shrieked aloud and fled with haste from out the Chamber.

The KING at last gets hold of vest, makes as if to throw back bedclothes and rise from bed. QUEEN and LADY MARJORIE exit hurriedly right. SIR NANCE in comic alarm tries to hide the KING from their sight.

CURTAIN

fittingly reward her. And when he had come to an end of speaking he sate him on his Throne and cast about him as to how he could reward the damsel at littlest cost.

SENTINEL *blows trumpet.*

KING *stands on dais in front of throne.*

KING *sits on throne.*

And the Queen, seeing his perplexity and knowing him full well, saith unto him "Tush, man! 'Tis easy as casting off a wornout shoe! Give thou the wench unto Sir Nance as wife, and so reward at once the twain. And, moreover, we gain as faithful servitors man and wife—no small matter, methinks, in these days when good servants are so hard to come by!" At this the King rejoiced within himself, and he did graciously consent. And summoning the twain before him he did, at that same Court, bestow the Lady Marjorie upon his faithful Lord Sir Nance, with promise to consider with much favour an increase in their salaries . . . which—as hath aforetime been told—were NIX.

SIR NANCE and LADY MARJORIE *kneel before throne.* KING *joins their hands and assumes a "bless you my children," attitude.*

ANCIENT DAME *runs forward and kneels before the throne.*

Then did the Ancient Dame of the Laundry prostrate herself before the Throne, crying, "A boon, Great King, a boon! Doth nothing come to this little one?" And the King did answer "Napoo!" But the Queen, plucking him by the sleeve, saith, "I'faith, Penurias, let her take what doth remain of yonder Flemish knave." Then saith the King, and gazed at her with admiration in his eyes, "Now, by My Silken Purse-strings, Honeydew, thou art a Queen after my very heart." And to the Ancient Dame he saith, "An thou dost seek a mate, take thou the fragments of yon Dust Collector, but mark him well, lest he doth make thee fade away before thy time!"

ANCIENT DAME *returns right and takes FLEMING by the arm. Leads him to steps of throne, and KING "marries" them. They then return right.*

SENTINEL *steps smartly to throne, salutes, and stands at "attention."*

And then the Sentinel, seeing weddings were afoot, besought His Majesty that he would grant to him a bride. "Right gladly," quoth the King; "but, alas, methinks demand doth far exceed supply, and never one fair wench remains for thee."

At that the Sentinel cast one quick look around the Court, and saw to his dismay the King had



THIS remarkable play is worthy of attention because, while its serious moral problems are reminiscent of the old miracle and morality plays, the dignity of the blank verse in which it is written forms a fitting medium for so moving a subject.

In the acting of this play perhaps more so than with any other play in the book beautifully modulated speech and perfect diction are essential. This cultured control of voice gives added dignity to an already heroic theme. Again disciplined and graceful movement together with artistic grouping are absolutely essential. Let the producer see to it that Veru and his twelve pupils do not pile themselves up into an untidy heap upon the stage. A marked contrast in attitude and voice between Camillus and Veru will help to accentuate the dramatist's intended contrast between the two points of view which these men symbolise.

Again the austerity of the theme demands a stern simplicity in the setting of the stage, and heavy curtains will be found far more effective than too elaborate an attempt at a detailed scene.

Some noises-off, if provided by means of a suitable gramophone record (and these may be obtained specially for these purposes from the leading manufacturers) may aid a sense of reality if properly controlled, but some producers would consider them unnecessary.

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The terms for performance by professionals can be ascertained on application.

CHARACTERS

CAMILLUS, *a Roman General.*

MARCUS, *a Roman Officer.*

VERU, *a Faliscan Schoolmaster.*

TWELVE YOUTHS, *his Pupils.*

AN AMBASSADOR.

A ROMAN PICKET.

SCENE : *The Roman camp outside the city of Falerii
in Etruria.*

CAMILLUS AND THE SCHOOLMASTER

SCENE : *The interior of CAMILLUS's tent. An opening at the back reveals at some distance the lofty walls and towers of FALERII. CAMILLUS sits at a table. MARCUS stands at the tent-door.*

Marcus : Behold the dawn upon Falerii ;
That hovers gleaming in the morning haze,
Like immaterial city of a dream,
Or mirage on the burning desert sky.
Camillus, I have watched her day by day
As our dull siege drags on, and every hour
She changes with the wind, the clouds, the rain,
In ever-blending hues : sometimes a rose
At sunrise, and a sapphire in the evening,
At noon a pearl, or bubble blown of fire.
I shall be grieved almost when she is fallen
And through her glimmering gates the Romans
 pour,
Fearful in conquering her to lose her soul,
And see her rainbow beauty rot and blacken.
The cities that men build express their minds,
And these Faliscans in their town have reared
A symbol of aspiring art and thought—
A monument of grace and liberty.

Camillus : They are reputed philosophical ;

We find them stout, defiant, obstinate,
 Or they would yield now, as ere long they must,
 And know it ; but they fight on stubbornly.
 A good stock, Marcus, that must graft on Rome,
 For she needs all the best, and this tough state
 Must be absorbed with many more in one—
 And that one, Roman . . . I prolong this siege
 To guard our hordes from internecine strife,
 For in their factious broils they waste Rome's
 power.

We're a young race, but far more vigorous
 Than aught that we have conquered ; so shall
 spread

From sea to sea, subduing lesser folk.
 Men must we have to augment our armies, Marcus,
 And those who most rebel most needed are,
 For they're good fighters . . . 'Tis our destiny thus
 To unify the peoples of the world.

The morning's quiet ; but from behind those walls
 Their soldiers watch us. I can feel their eyes—
 By day, by night.

Marcus (pointing) : Yet how they mock at us,
 For now again, 'tis the fourth time, Camillus,
 See yonder little troop adventure forth :
 Faliscan schoolmaster and high-born youths,
 Wandering outside their walls as if they cared
 nought

For this unending siege.

Camillus :

Our men are puzzled,

But will not touch them, for they go unarmed,
Chanting in Greek. 'Tis but a game to flaunt
Their liberty that seems impregnable.

Marcus : By Juno, they are bold ! . . . Look !
They stroll on

Towards our pickets . . . Ah !

Camillus : They're taken now.

Marcus : The schoolman speaks—protests.

Camillus : He's acting, Marcus.

This may well be to blind us . . . 'Tis a plot !
Some treachery's here, or I myself am blind.
They come this way.

Marcus : Their business is with thee.

*Enter VERU, the Schoolmaster, led by a
Roman Picket and followed by twelve youths
between the ages of thirteen and fifteen.*

Picket : This man, sire, calls himself a school-
master,
And yields him and his pupils unto Rome.

*CAMILLUS signs to the Picket to go. Exit
Picket.*

Veru : Great Roman, though a feint hath
brought us here,
We're honest—guileless ; and our mission—peace.

Camillus : Lads of Falerii, come ye to this camp
In public office of ambassadors ?

First Scholar : In private office, sire, of peace-makers.

Veru signs to the boys, who kneel before CAMILLUS.

Veru : Lo ! In the persons of these gentle boys
 Accept the city of Falerii—
 By their submission make her freedom thine.
 Sons are they of her noblest citizens—
 Heirs of her leading statesmen, rulers, lords—
 Guided by me to value subject peace
 Above the bloody, warring liberty
 You have imposed upon us. They have learned
 That Rome is mightier than Falerii,
 And that we fight in vain. So, to prevent
 The fruitless loss of our most precious lives—
 The ruin of our future usefulness—
 I come, unknown to any but these few,
 Whose minds I mould, that they of their own wills
 May cede the city of their birth to Rome.
 For the Faliscans, learning that their sons—
 The future lords and rulers of their race—
 Prefer Rome's rule to their inheritance,
 Will yield. I know their minds ; foresee their acts.
 Then shall they also grow to understand
 That we, though second to your greater race,
 May still preserve the freedom of the mind ;
 And, as before, ere Rome destroyed our peace,
 Pursue our lofty sciences and arts
 In honour of ourselves and all mankind.

Thou art noble, great Camillus; we admire thee,
Trusting our country to thee without fear.

The gates are open ! Call thy legions ! Enter !

Boys: The gates are open! Call thy legions!
Enter!

Camillus (to boys) : Rise, rise, ye craven ones !
(*To Veru*) Man, art thou mad ?

(To boys) Up! For your master's mad, and ye
debauched

By a demented mind. Or come ye all
From madhouse? Or is this some cunning trick?

Veru: In seeming to be taken unawares—
Surprised by your swift-footed soldiery—
We duped Falerii for Falerii's good.

I swear now by my mother's womb, 'tis true.
Thine unbelief, Camillus, is not strange,
Belonging, as thou dost, to warlike race
Which deems men mad who do not will to fight.
But we are sane—the sanest of our clan;
Peace do we love, not war; and for the sake
Of unborn generations sacrifice
To thee our city. Take it! It is thine!

Boys: Take it, O noble Roman, it is thine!

Camillus : Must I believe thee, then, in thy right mind ?

Would thou wert mad, that madness might excuse
Thy turpitude ; for to be sane and treacherous
Proves thee gratuitously vile.

Marcus : Maybe
This man is one who to his country's honour,

Prefers the favour of his enemies,
When these are heroes. I have known such men.

Camillus : If that be so, more vile and more he
grows.

First Scholar : Dare not calumniate our learned
master,

For he is far more good, more wise, than thou,
If thou lovest battle, for he loveth peace.

Boys : Yea ! Yea ! Thou shalt not scorn our
gentle teacher.

Camillus : O ye deceived, I'll talk with ye anon.

Veru : Camillus, thou hast mistranslated me.

Thy mind has stuck midway at my deceit ;
Let it move onwards towards my glorious goal !
That which seems false and treacherous in my deed
Is absolute right ; for by it I preserve
A thousand hopeful, good, and useful lives
That death would render wasted to mankind ;
Unnumbered gentle hearts from needless pain ;
A country from bereavement of her young.
Oh ! In her children is a country blessed ;
They dead, what has she but the old, the worn,
Who doubt the future and regret the past ?
She must have youth ! Young men to wed her
maids,

And build her time-to-come with faith and hope.
We are but few ; O shall we lose our best
For what's a fruitless battling ? Nay ! Nay ! Nay !
Heroic general, make our city thine
Ere she be ruined ; for, though she be yours

In body, still her spirit is her own.

O make her thine, Camillus ; make her thine,
That war may end, and she, allied to Rome,
In peace and honour may pursue her course !

Boys : In peace and honour may pursue her
course !

Camillus : Honour ! Wouldst thou commit a
base iniquity

And order me do likewise, wretched one,
That I may triumph on thy felony ?
War must be harsh, but it is honourable ;
The peace which thou hast offered is depraved.
Know there are certain rules of honest war
Good men observe ; one such is to forego
Advantages by evil means obtained.
Generals through their own genius should suc-
ceed,

Not by a traitor's secret villainy.
Thou hast forgotten the genesis of thy race—
Founded, 'tis told, by Agamemnon's son—
And shamed thine ancestor's almighty ghost.
Thou playest with thought as Sophists do with
words,

Making thereby a wrong thing seem a right.
Look on thy city walls and beat thy breast !
Think on thine origin ! Repent ! Repent !

Veru : O bitter disappointment—vanished hope
—Lost faith ! Thou art dull, Camillus, thou art
dull ;

Thou, whom I judged a thinker, canst not lift

Thy thought and vision to mine. Nay ; thou art slave

To custom—to the morals of the dead—

To antique ideals, rotten with rust of time,

Begetting ignorance, blindness, superstition.—

(*To boys*) O how are we mistaken in this man !

First Scholar (to Camillus) : "Thou, being a prince of war, art foolish, dull.

And we despise thee now . . . By Jupiter !

We blush to think that once we knelt to thee—

Cringed to a sword !

Camillus : Yea, 'twas a shameful deed.

O evil man, to poison these children's minds ;

For see how noble is their natural bent !

First Scholar : We hear thee not. We are as deaf to thee.

Camillus : Deaf ? But the wise must heed their enemies.

Have I not listened in patience to your guide ?

Open your ears and give your wits the rein.

Ye have not thought but through your mentor's mind ;

Ye have not acted but by his command ;

Ye have not felt but his will prompted you—

Ye are his slaves, his creatures, nay—his tools.

So have ye lost your pride, your sense, your shame,

And meanly grovelled to an enemy ;

Babbled of peace and sold, behind her face,

Your country—yea, your fathers, and your mothers—

Dishonourably and basely to your foe.

Night thieves, night thieves are ye, that in the
dark

Would rob your kindred of their liberty.

Is this not beggarly and infamous ?

Veru (to boys) : Hearken no more ! (*To Camillus*)
Thou canst not turn their hearts.

First Scholar : 'Tis just that we do hear him.
(*To Camillus*) So ; speak on.

Camillus : I surely waste my words, perfidious
babes,

For ye are soaked in this man's treachery.

Alas ! Ye traitors to your land—so young,

So cruelly mistaught. The spirit weeps

To look on ye . . . O thou nefarious man,

To foul the native sweetness of their hearts !

Boys ! Boys ! Were it not nobler and more fair

To fight for freedom ; to gird on your swords

And bar yon gates against your enemies,

Than play the sneak ? . . . Yet look on him ye
love ;

Look closely and behold what man he is :

One who has drugged your conscience ; stolen
your honour ;

And taught you wickedly that wrong is right.

Look closer on him ; read what I have read ;

Then think of Rome, and hear her tongue de-
clare,

She will not touch your state with indign hands,

But fight to win it, as ye, if ye were men,
Not cowardly babes, would fight and die to save it.

Veru (to boys): Speak! show this erring man
your hearts are staunch.

Your wills unwavering . . .

First Scholar: Brothers! ye have heard:
Camillus scorns us, and would have us fight
For liberty; while Veru sues for peace,
Dishonourably, but for a lofty aim.
Which deem you now is right? . . . Ye are per-
plexed,

(Pointing to Camillus) But I will tell you . . .
Here's the righteous man!

And we have dragged our honour in the dust;
Befouled the splendour of our ancient lines,
(Pointing to Veru) At his plebeian prompting.

Hear me then:

I say this man's a hero; that a knave!

Boys: Aye! Aye! This man's a hero; that a
knave!

First Scholar: Right ends shall by right means
alone be won;

We'll win our peace then, captive be it or free,
In honour!

Boys: Yea! In honour our peace we'll win.

The FIRST SCHOLAR clasps CAMILLUS's hand.

Veru: Ah, children, children! Yet I blame ye
not—

Your minds, unsteadfast as the sea, reflect
All passing colours of the night and day,
Each blotting out the hue that shone before,
But how couldst thou, Camillus, turn their hearts
By such erroneous bloody rede of right,
And false concept of honour? Woe is me!
How hast thou robbed me—how am I bereft!
These were my joy, my glory, my sweet hope
Of peace and love—my victory were these
O'er the brute, predatory powers of war—
Oh, these were mine—

First Scholar: Jove bless thee, great Camillus!
We'll fight thee, though we fight the man we love,
For freedom's sake, in glory of our sires!
Brothers, bind up this bad man's arms, and beat
him
Back to Falerii. He did wound our hearts;
We'll wound his body.

*Some of the boys untie their girdles and fasten
VERU'S hands behind his back. Others prepare
to lash him; but, suppressing them, he speaks
again.*

Veru: Hear me! Hear me once.
Who soon for evermore shall silent be.
Great men are by that age in which they live
Begotten; not by chance do they arise;
So, in this pristine epoch of rude strife,
Prodigious generals, like thee, are born.

But nations pass ; and time-to-come shall see
 Thy Rome a name—a faded memory
 Of vanished ideals and mistaken might,
 When on the earth a unity of states—
 Each free, each loving her sisters' liberty—
 Blossoms and prospers, fed by faith and trust ;
 When love and reason human conduct guide.
 Then shall the great be true philosophers—
 Both men and women, prophets of good-will,
 Who battle but against our sufferings :
 Vice, superstition, sickness of the soul,
 Which your huge slaughter breeds upon the
 bosom
 Of this distempered world. Then, O brave man,
 The jargon of the battlefield will be
 A language dead, as dead must be its use.
 And then shall be my triumph, your defeat !

I cannot know that dawn of blessedness
 With living eyes, yet satisfied depart,
 For as I gaze into futurity
 I see the promise, and I dream the dream.

*The boys drop their scourges and follow VERU
 quietly off the stage.*

Marcus : Alas, poor mad apostle of perfection !
Camillus : How much may come of this mis-
 guided plot

We know not. Let us therefore watch, and wait.

The curtain falls, to express the passage of a few hours.

The curtain rises on the same scene. MARCUS stands at the tent-door. CAMILLUS paces to and fro.

Marcus : Behold at last ! Falerii's shining gates
Swing sudden wide ! See how the flood bursts
through,
Headed by one who comes this way, unarmed !
Now do our pickets stop and question him—
Point hither. Who is he that comes alone,
While the crowd triumphs ?

Shouts heard.

Camillus : This is strange indeed.

Enter the Roman Picket with an Ambassador from Falerii.

Picket : The Senate of Falerii, Camillus,
Despatch this man as their ambassador.

Exit Picket.

Ambassador : Now is no time, O General of the
Romans,
For forms, so unattended do I come,

To thank you, in her name, for your high act
 In spurning the flagitious treachery
 Of one we loathe to call Faliscan born.
 His deed his outraged pupils to their sires
 In hot humiliation and remorse
 Described. Whereon a council was convened
 That did despatch me as ambassador
 To voice the purpose of Falerii :

You, to a cowardly triumph, faith in war
 Preferred, and bade our children act as men ;
 We, challenged by your noble deed, resign
 To you of our free will the victory.
 Not cravenly, but with an open joy,
 That peace, on both sides honourable, is won.

Camillus : The victory is yours, Ambassador.

The AMBASSADOR and CAMILLUS salute each other.

Ambassador : Falerii greets her lord.

Camillus (to Ambassador, who is going) : Stay !
 what of him

Whom maybe you and I too much revile—
 The schoolman ? I would speak with him
 again.

Ambassador : Dead.

Camillus : Ah— !

Ambassador : By his own hand.

Exeunt MARCUS and the AMBASSADOR.
CAMILLUS removes his helm.

Camillus : Veru, well done !
Thou hast attained the stars of thy desire
Which, beckoning from thy particular heaven,
Blinded thee to more honourable lights.
More honourable ? Yet can there be two standards
Of honour ? Then, grant two, you must grant
twenty—
And what of justice, law ? Still hast thou
triumphed,
Faliscan Veru ; to thyself wast loyal !
But why am I uneasy at thy deed ?

Unquiet is that moment when some thought
Jars on the door of a complacent mind
That trusted its infallibility—
Some thought—perhaps some act—that bids us
pause,
And question whether the most cherished aim
To which our lives we dedicate, be false.

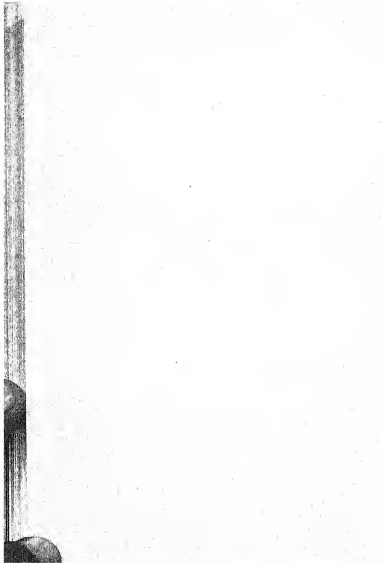
But there are riddles too profound for men—
By gods alone to be interpreted ;
Or by remote futurity resolved.

CURTAIN

SAFE CUSTODY

BY

F. AUSTIN HYDE



THIS is a comedy of rustic humour which is likely to prove popular with both town and country audiences. It has the further advantage of being easily transferred into any local dialect, to which can be given an added spice of humour by a sprinkling of local place-names.

Despite its apparent simplicity, however, it is not necessarily a play easy to produce. There are certain pitfalls for the unwary. The strongest character part of course is that of the postmistress, and this should be acted in a lively and convincing manner. Standfast's is a simpler part, but the tendency to caricature must not be allowed to go too far. The thinnest characters obviously are those of the Unknown Man and the Unknown Woman, and although their parts are small, an attempt must be made to make them live. Too melodramatic a villain and villainess, too much of the burlesque and the subtle comedy of the play will be ruined.

The setting of the stage should not present real difficulty; but some ingenuity is called for in suggesting the right atmosphere of the village post office without too great an insistence on detail. Some care must be exercised in planning the movements of the various players as they enter Miss Kettlewell's domain, if the monotony of everyone doing exactly the same thing is to be avoided.

Notice with what success the dramatist in this play has kept our interest to the very end, and what an unexpected climax it is when we realise that, after all, Maria Kettlewell has proved herself worthy of the trust placed in her by His Majesty's Government, and that despite their seeming victory, the thieves have been frustrated.

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LONDON :

H. F. W. DEANE & SONS,
THE YEAR BOOK PRESS LTD.,
31 MUSEUM STREET, W.C.1.

BOSTON, MASS., U.S.A. :

THE BAKER INTERNATIONAL PLAY BUREAU

CHARACTERS

MARIA KETTLEWELL, *the Village Postmistress.*

JOHN STANDFAST, *the Village Policeman.*

MARY, *the Maid at the Hall.*

LADY MANNERLY, *the Wife of the Squire.*

AN UNKNOWN WOMAN.

AN UNKNOWN MAN.

SCENE : *The Village Post Office.*

TIME : *The Present.*



A village shop. The curtain rises to show the counter, half of which is the Post Office, protected by a grille placarded with Government notices, the other end decorated with the variety of wares which mark a village general shop—bottles of sweets, packets of groceries, and boxes of all kinds. There is a window behind the counter, looking off L. The shop door is on the L.

Behind the counter stands MISS MARIA KETTLEWELL, a comely body of forty, in conversation with the village policeman, who is seated on a chair R.

Miss K. (punctuating her remarks by stamping the letters of the day's mail) : I'd sooner have t'Christmas rush ony day than t'first few days i' January! They're both about as thrang, but at Christmas time iverybody's as happy as laddie, sendin' their bits o' presents an' their Christmas cards an' sike-like. You can't help but feel what a deal o' kindness an' happiness there is i'd world. But t'fost fortnight i' January iverybody seems as mean as muck! Dog licence to buy—grumble! Wireless licence—grumble! Carriage licence—grumble! It's all grumble, grumble, grumble! If it wasn't for t'awd age pensioners it wad be a thankless job sarvin' t'British Government i' January. You do get a smile an' a "Thank

you " fra them, but t'others is all as sour as crab-apples !

P.C. S. : Aye, but there's all t'difference in t'world between givin' to other folks an' payin' to t'Government !

Miss K. : Now you're sidin' wiv 'em. An' you a Government sarvant ! You're just as bad as t'rest.

P.C. S. : Nowt o't sort ! I's same as I was afore Christmas. Standfast's my name, an' I stand fast by what I've allus said. An' I've come to offer t'same present.

Miss K. : An' what may that be, pray ?

P.C. S. : You know very weel. Ivery month last year I made t'same offer—a faithful heart, a bonny little house, a nice bit o' garden, a livin' wage an' a pension at forty-six, an' no more botherin' wi' grumblin' folk !

Miss K. : An' my answer's same this year as it was last ! Nowt ni less than a sergeant ! Get your sergeant's stripes an' I don't say but what I might begin to think about it.

P.C. S. : It's all right sayin' "Get your sergeant's stripes." What chance have I in a place like this ?

Miss K. : Then gan ti some place where you can get 'em !

P.C. S. : No, not when it would mean leavin' you all alone an' unprotected here.

Miss K. : I'll tell you what it is, John Standfast

—if you spent less time protectin' me an' this Post Office; like what you are doin' now, an' a bit mair time preservin' law an' order i' t' parish, chance o' promotion would 'appen come.

P.C. S. : Promotion? How can it? There's mair keepers than poachers. There's been neither thieves nor burglars for ten year. Roads is ower twisty an' crooked for onybody to exceed speed limit in a motor-car. Seein' that farmers dip their sheep an' get a permit for movin' pigs is about all there is, an' that brings mair hard words than stripes.

Miss K. : An' yonder across at t'Hall this varry afternoon it's Rent Day. Squire an' his missus has come back fra foreign parts specially for it. Mair than a dozen motor-cars all wantin' guardin'. All that money comin' into t'village, an' here you are!

P.C. S. : Rent day's owered. Farmers has all gone home. I seed Maister Coulter, he was t'last to gan. "Now," I says, "what sort of a dinner ha' you had?" "Oh," he says, "middlin', middlin'." It a'most made yan forget t'price o' barley. Aye," he says, "I've been at mony a warse do!"

Miss K. : Then you may depend upon it he'd had a rare good dinner.

P.C. S. : Well, there was nobody drunk an' disorderly after it. No, promotion doesn't come i' this village. Couldn't you think a bit less about stripes an' a bit mair about me?

Miss K. : Not after eight days o' January ! I've seen mair o' men an' their ways this week than I want. I'd sooner keep single all my life than live wi' sike grumblin' bodies.

P.C. S. (*making ready to go*) : Here's somebody comin'. I mun away be goin'. But think on—if ever you do change your mind, I should think mair about it than ony promotion !

Miss K. : If you thought a bit mair about promotion, I should be mair likely to change my mind.

Exit P.C. STANDFAST. Enter MARY who says "Good afternoon, Policeman," in passing STANDFAST.

Mary : Good afternoon, Miss Kettlewell.

Miss K. : Good afternoon, honey. What you've gotten back to t'Hall then ? You'll have had a thrang day to-day wi' t'rents ?

Mary : Oh, we have. Squire an' t'missus come back specially for it. An' there was sike a spread ! An' it's been pay-day for us, Miss Kettlewell, an' I want to send some o' mine to my mother.

Miss K. : I's varry glad to hear it, honey. It isn't ivery lass that does, now-a-days. What wi' bisittles, an' pictures, an' silk stockings, there's a deal on 'em forgets t'awd folks. How much did she want to send ?

Mary : Two pounds, Miss Kettlewell. I would

ha' kept it while I goes home for my day out next week, but her ladyship's brought a maid back fra t'London house that I wouldn't trust wiv a hau'penny. She's been nosin' an' quizzin' intiv iverybody's business iver since she got here. Nowt's safe wi' sike folk about.

Miss K. : Now my bairn, no tellin' tales out o' school.

Mary : You just wait till you see her, Miss Kettlewell. But what's t'best way ti send my money?

Miss K. : Why, you can send it i' notes iv a redchestered letter, but that'll cost you fourpence. Or you can buy Postal Orders, but that would cost you threepence. Or you could send it iv a ordinary envelope, an' that would nobbut cost you t'stamp. You'll ha' written a letter?

Mary : Yes, it's here.

Miss K. : Why, it isn't quite so safe, an' Government maybe wouldn't like me to advise you to do it, but it'll nobbut gan on ti Driffeld i' one van an' on to your village iv another, an' I knaw our postmen's to be trusted. Put it in wi' your letter, but don't tell Government I advised you to.

Mary : Well, I will. (*She puts it in the envelope.*) But you will take care of it, won't you, Miss Kettlewell? (*She hands over the letter.*) It's a lot o' money.

Miss K. : Now, my bairn, this envelope's en-

trusted to me an' t'British Government, an' that means safer than t'Bank of England.

Mary: Aye, but yan reads sike things i' t'paper, all about these mail-bag robberins, an' Post Office hold-ups an'—

Miss K.: You don't want to believe hauf o' what you read i' t'papers. I'm sure I doesn't.

Mary: Aay, but nobbut yisterday it telled about a man throwin' pepper at a body, an' stealin' off—

Miss K.: Mary, do you think that Postmaster-General would ha' putten me here if I wasn't to be trusted?

Mary: No, Miss Kettlewell. But you see it's all t'money I have this month, an' my mother needs it that badly. Couldn't you put it in a drawer in t'house?

Miss K.: House is my private property, Post Office is H.M. Government's. Noo, we'll keep it safe, honey.

She bends down behind the counter. MARY stretches over to see the last of the precious envelope.

Miss K. (straightening up, impressively): Now, Mary, Government doesn't allow thou to gan looking intiv its secrets.

Mary: I'm sorry, Miss Kettlewell. But you have a safe, haven't you?

Miss K. : Why, yes, honey.

Mary : Oh, then, even if onybody was to come——

Miss K. : Do you think that onybody would be so daft as to come tiv a lahtle spot like this? An' if they did, Postmaster-General has ivery confidence i' me.

Mary : Aye, but it seems sike a lot o' money.

Miss K. : You're right! Folks doesn't realise what responsibility me and H.M. Government has to bear. They'd grumble less if they did.

Mary : Well, I'll be going back. It isn't my day out, but t'missus let me come. Good afternoon, Miss Kettlewell.

Miss K. : Good afternoon, Mary.

Mary : An' you will keep it safe locked up, won't you, Miss Kettlewell?

Miss K. : As safe as t'Bank of England, honey.

Exit MARY. MISS K. busies herself behind the counter, saying, "As safe as safe can be."

Enter LADY MANNERLY.

Lady M. : Good afternoon, Miss Kettlewell.

Miss K. : Oh, good afternoon, maam. Mary was just sayin' you an' t'squire had gotten back. Have you had a good time, maam?

Lady M. : Oh, a wonderful time, Miss Kettlewell. We've been to Egypt.

Miss K. : Indeed, maam ! An' how's t'turnips lookin' there ?

Lady M. (*suppressing a smile*) : I'm afraid they don't grow them, Miss Kettlewell.

Miss K. : Then wha'tiver do they do for winter meat ? An' how's t'Squire maam ?

Lady M. : Not at all well to-day, I'm sorry to say. He's got a cough. (*She pronounces it "corf."*)

Miss K. : Oh, a cauf, maam, a cauf ? Is it a bull or a heifer ?

Lady M. : A cough, Miss Kettlewell, a congh ! It's the sudden change from sunny skies to this awful rainy, snowy weather. He's quite unable to come out to-day, and the steward is ill, too, consequently, I've had all the business of Rent Day to do.

Miss K. : I's sorry to hear it, maam, but it's a cheerfuller business takin' rents than what it is payin' 'em, I's think.

Lady M. : Well, that's what brings me here. I've a most important package for the post, Miss Kettlewell.

Miss K. : That's t'second to-day, maam.

Lady M. (*dropping her voice*) : I don't mind you knowing, Miss Kettlewell, I know you are to be trusted. It's the rents, for the Bank. We've no safe at the Hall, and it's such a responsibility. So many of the farmers will not use cheques.

Miss K. : No, maam, they won't. You see, cheques cost twopence apiece.

Lady M.: Yes, but think of the additional security ovèr these miserable Treasury notes.

Miss K.: I know, maam, but it's t'same wi' Postal Orders, they grudge H.M. Government t'poundage. Awd Willie Mook come for three yisterday, an' was that vexed 'cos I wouldn't put 'em in a bit cheaper when he was takin' three! An' Tommy Bagshaw fra t'mill allus axes for sixpence back for luck when he buys Insurance Stamps. They're all t'same.

Lady M. (producing package): I want to register this, Miss Kettlewell. (*Confidentially*) There are £785.

Miss K.: Why, you niver want to pay full registration on all that? It'll tak' a deal o' reckonin 'up. Threepence for £5, fourpence for £20, fivepence for £40, that's as far as I remember, though it's one an' elevenpence for £400. That's about as far as t'regulations go.

Lady M.: I don't know what to do. I ought to insure it to the full amount, but it seems such a lot just to send it to Driffeld. There's only the van down and the delivery to the Bank. Surely it will be all right?

Miss K.: If me an' t'Government can't look after it, Lady Mannerly, nobody can.

Lady M.: Well, I'll pay the ordinary registration. It is stamped for the weight, and sealed.

She hands over the parcel. Miss K. writes out the receipt and hands it over.

Lady M.: You have a safe, Miss Kettlewell?

Miss K.: Oh, yis, I've a safe, Government sees to that.

Lady M.: Perhaps I'd better stay until the mail-van comes, Miss Kettlewell. I'm very anxious.

Miss K.: That you can't do, my lady. Government requires me to lock this office i' five minutes, an' I've some o' my letters to stamp an' t' mail-bag to seal. Regulations is regulations! You'll ha' to go, I doubt.

Lady M.: You will put the package in safe custody, Miss Kettlewell, won't you?

Miss K.: Aye, that I will, my lady. That's what t' Postmaster-General put me here for. Good afternoon.

Lady M.: Good afternoon, Miss Kettlewell.

Exit LADY M. MISS K. busies herself down behind the counter.

Miss K.: They talk about the cares o' this world an' the deceitfulness o' riches! I shall be thankful when I get rid o' this lot. (*She begins again to stamp letters.*) It can't be lang now, t' mail-van's a'most due. Hark ye! That sounds like it now. (*She moves to the little window and looks out.*) No, it isn't. It's a private car, an' a lady gettin' out. Who can it be? Some off-comed body by t' looks of her. What's she stopped

there for? (*With rising excitement.*) Whatever is she doin'? Right again t'lamp on t'wall. She's fiddlin' about wi our tallyphone wire! She's cutten it clean i' two! Where's Standfast? She's turned t'lamp out! What on earth!

Enter the UNKNOWN LADY.

U. L.: Good afternoon (*a little breathless*). I've just come across from the Hall where I'm staying with my friend Lady Mannerly.

Miss K. (with marked incredulity): Indeed!

U. L.: Lady Mannerly asked me to call. She brought a package to post a few minutes ago, and has decided that as my husband and I are going into town by car, we had better take it. Will you please let me have it?

Miss K.: That I will not! In t'first place, you don't need to come fra t'Hall iv a motor, 'cos it's nobbut just across t'road. In t'second, place, Lady Mannerly left here not more than a minute since, an' she doesn't change her mind like a weather-cock, and in t'third place, that packet is now in t'care o' me and t'Postmaster-General. (*Warming to her subject.*) How you come to know her ladyship's private business beats me!—Oh no, it doesn't! You'll be t'fine new lady's maid fra London, that makes a point 'o nosin' into iverbody's private business! I've heard tell o' you!

U. L. : Nothing of the kind! Nothing of the kind!

Miss K. : Then perhaps you'll be good enough to explain, as you'll ha' ti explain to your betters afore long, what you were doing at that tallyphone wire wi' a pair o' pliers, afore you comed in here! Out o' this office you go this varry minute, you bad wicked woman!

The UNKNOWN LADY steps away from the counter and claps her hands loudly. The UNKNOWN MAN enters, produces a revolver and points it at Miss K.

U. M. : Hands up! Both your hands above your head, quickly!

Miss K. (standing bravely) : I shall do nowt o' t'sort! Put that nasty thing i' your pocket this minute!

U. M. : Hand over your letters, and in particular a package that was brought in here a few minutes since!

Miss K. : I shall do no such thing, and if you aren't out o' this shop i' one minute, I shall call a policeman! I'll larn you to come pointin' your nasty ugly guns at me!

She comes rapidly round the counter as if to tackle the pair unaided.

U. M. : Another step forward and you'll be in another world !

Miss K. : An' I reckon I should come on there better than what you would, you brazzant hound ! Out o' this office you go !

She turns quickly to the counter, snatches up a packet of flour ; and before he has time to anticipate her action, breaks it over his head, covering him. He closes with her, seizes her by the wrists. The woman accomplice throws a scarf round Miss K.'s mouth, gagging her. Together they force her, struggling, to the chair. The man produces short lengths of rope with which they tie her to the chair, the man directing, " Tighter ! Tighter ! "

U. L. : The safe's behind the counter on the right, down on the floor.

Miss K. *renews her struggles.*

U. M. : Tie her feet with this !

He goes behind the counter and bends to the safe.

U. L. : Bring it away as it is ! Shove it in the mail-bag.

U. M. : Get outside ! If the way's clear, cough !

Get to the steering wheel and start the second I come ! (*Exit U. L.*)

The man pulls out the safe, puts it in the mail-bag, comes round the counter, stands listening. There is a cough outside. He goes quickly out. A pause, during which Miss K. tries to work her chair towards the door. She struggles, in vain, to release the ropes. No sound comes from her gagged mouth, but the movement of her head is indicative of the righteous indignation she feels. Enter MARY.

Mary : Oh, Miss Kettlewell, I forgot to——

She sees Miss K., screams and turns to run away, stops, goes forward and pulls the scarf from Miss K.'s mouth.

Mary : Oh, Miss Kettlewell, whatever's happened ? Who's done it ? Whoiver's done it ?

Miss K. : Your fine lady's maid, I reckon ! (*She coughs and gasps for breath.*) Away you gan an' fetch t'policeman ! He won't be far away. He niver is ! Niver mind me, I'm alright ! Bring him here ! Robbery ! Mail-bag and t'safe ! Hurry up, lass ! Hurry up !

Exit MARY shouting " Help."

Miss K.: Oh! wha'tiver would t'Postmaster-General say if he seed me like this? That brazen hound of a thief! An' that brass-faced woman wiv him! But it'll take him a bit to get Bradshaw's Best English Flour out of his hair! I'm glad I thought o' that. It'll help Standfast to track him down! Government'll ha'e to pay for t'flour! It was used i' Government service!

Enter P.C. STANDFAST.

P.C. S. (going across and beginning to unfasten ropes): Oh, Maria! Maria! If you'd nobbut listened to me! Who's done it?

Miss K.: Leave me alone! I'm alright! Away you go, as fast as your legs'll carry you, to t'Hall, to their tallyphone! They've cutten our wires. Ring up police stations at Driffeld, Beverley, and Market Weighton. There's nobbut three roads they can gan! A lahtle car! A man and a woman! T'man's had a packet o' flour broken ower his head, so he'll be middlin' good to find! Left here wi' a mail-bag an' a safe! Robbery wi' violence! Oh run! (*He hesitates.*) Run, man, run! An'—Oh! I hope it'll mean sergeant's stripes!

P.C. S.: Oh, Maria! Do you mean it?

Miss K.: I do!

Exit P.C. S. at the double. Enter MARY.

As she comes in MISS K.'s head droops. She

almost faints. MARY sees this, tugs frantically at the ropes, releases her, rubs hër hands and face, saying "Oh, Miss Kettlewell, Miss Kettlewell!" After a time she revives.

Mary : Oh, Miss Kettlewell, are you alright ?

Miss K. (gasping) : Aye, honey, I'm alright now. It was nobbut my palpitations. And no wonder ! I've niver been treated so i' my life afore ! The wicked, murderous thieves !

Mary : Oh, an' did you say they'd ta'en t'mail-bag an' t'safe ? (*On the point of tears.*) Oh, an' my two pounds ! An' you said it was as safe as t'Bank of England.

Enter LADY M. in great haste.

Lady M. : Miss Kettlewell, whatever's happened ? I met P.C. Standfast running across to the Hall, and he said there'd been a burglary !

Miss K. (generous with her recovered breath) : Happened, my lady ? Mair than I iver want to happen again ! I've been murderously pointed at wiv a eighteen chambered revolver, telled to hold my hands aboon my head, which I didn't, nor niver have since I left school !—Shamelessly set upon by a brute of a man an' his female accompaniment—your fine new lady's maid, by what I can hear tell, tied to my awn chair——

Lady M. : My maid ? The one from London ?

But the mail-bag, Miss Kettlewell, and the safe ?
Have they taken the safe ?

Miss K. : They have, my lady—an' my butter in it ! As good a pound o' butter as iver come out o' t'churn ! I allus kept it there !

Lady M. : But my package, Miss Kettlewell !

Miss K. : Robbery wi' violence ! But they'll get 'em, maam. P.C. Standfast's on their track, an' if iver there was a man that desarved promotion, it's him !

Lady M. : But, Miss Kettlewell——

Miss K. : He'll get 'em ! I plastered that thief middlin' wiv a packet o' flour, an' t'rain'll do t'rest ! He'll be as blathered up wi' paste as t'painter's apprentice that tumbled into'd bucket.

Lady M. : But the rents, Miss Kettlewell, the rents !

Mary (in tears) : An' my two pounds that I was sending to my mother.

Miss K. : You needn't bother about your parcil for a minute, Lady Mannerly. Standfast'll get 'em !

Lady M. : They'll never be taken with the notes on them ! The first thing they would do when they got clear of the village would be to hide the packet ! What will they care for arrest and imprisonment when they've £785 to come out to ? Oh ! It's lost ! It's lost ! And I can only claim £5 !

Miss K. : Do you think I should be fond enough to let sike folk as that gan clear away wi' your

rents ? Didn't I insense you that what was trusted to me an' H.M. Government was as safe as t'Bank of England ? (*She sits down in the chair, turns back her skirt, showing a large canvas pocket stitched to her underskirt. From it she takes out the package and the letter and holds them aloft.*) I should niver think o' puttin' sike precious things as these in a safe !

Mary : Oh, Miss Kettlewell, you've kept it !

Lady M. : Miss Kettlewell ! You jewel !!! How perfectly splendid ! Oh, give it to me !

Miss K. : No, maam ! These packets is in t'safe custody o' me an' His Majesty's Government !

QUICK CURTAIN

(*The Driffield Players took an effective "Call" showing STANDFAST triumphant with safe, mail-bag, and sergeant's stripes.*)



POET'S CORNER

BY

MARY PAKINGTON



THIS piece illustrates the now popular biographical play. Here the dramatist has taken some well known facts in the poet's life, some lines from his poems and some gleanings from his letters and sympathetically and convincingly woven them into a single dramatic whole. It is a play which requires delicate acting and a well chosen setting.

The character of John Keats is a complex one and will call for a versatile actor to show us the contrast between Keats the man and Keats transfigured into the poet whenever he beholds some lovely thing or reaches some deep and stirring thought such as inspires him to the creation of poetry. John's love for his brother Tom is a real and an abiding passion tenderly portrayed, but there is nothing unmanly in it. It needs an experienced and a talented actor to interpret this subtle mingling.

Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to MESSRS. SAMUEL FRENCH, LIMITED, 26 SOUTHAMPTON STREET, LONDON, W.C.2., OR 25 WEST 45TH STREET, NEW YORK.

CHARACTERS

TOM KEATS

MRS. BENTLEY

FANNY BRAWNE

JOHN KEATS

LEIGH HUNT

SCENE: *The parlour of a furnished lodging in a house in Well Walk, Hampstead. Summer 1818.*

There is a window on the right, opening out to the front garden. In the back wall is a door right centre, leading into the passage to the stairs and front door. There is a small table on the right side of this against the wall, and on the other side a dresser, on which are a few books, plates, etc. Down on the left is the fireplace, and above it a door leading to the kitchen. Down on the right of centre is a round table partly laid for supper.

It is late afternoon, and though the sun is still bright outside a large fire burns in the grate. Propped up in an armchair beside it is TOM KEATS, a lad of nineteen, wasted with consumption.

MRS. BENTLEY, *the landlady, a brisk and buxom woman of middle age, enters carrying a scuttle of coals, which she brings to the fireplace down left, setting it down and starting to stir the fire.*

Tom: Oh, don't stir the fire, Mrs. Bentley! Couldn't you open the window instead?

Mrs. Bentley: The doctor said you was to be kept warm, Mr. Tom—and warm you shall be kept, if I have to melt for it!

Tom (smiling faintly) : 'Tis I that am the more likely to melt, Mrs. Bentley.

Mrs. Bentley (going up to the dresser and getting the supper things) : Yes, indeed ! for you look like a half-burnt candle already. I don't know whatever Mr. John'll say to you when he gets back.

Tom : Oh, but John won't be back from this Scotch tour for days and days yet ! . . .

Mrs. Bentley : Ah, well, you never know. He might take it into his head to get back a bit sooner.

Tom : But why . . . what . . . Mrs. Bentley—you haven't sent for him ?

Mrs. Bentley : Well, then, I haven't—but the Dilkes' maid tells me as Mr. Keats hinted in his last letter that he might be back earlier than expected.

Moving to the table and continuing the preparations for supper.

Tom (in quick alarm) : John isn't ill ?

Mrs. Bentley : Now don't you go fussing ! Who said so ? And he won't come to-day, you may be sure.

Tom : Oh, quite sure—just because I want to see him so excessively ! I often think I'm only half alive when John isn't here. But I wouldn't have him come back for me a day earlier——

Mrs. Bentley : Though it's likely enough he and

that Mr. Brown are doing no good in Scotland. By what I can hear the people are half savages, and you get nothing to eat but oatcake.

Tom : He'll want some good English beef and beer to make up. Mrs. Bentley, don't you think you could put just a bite of extra supper on the table, in case . . .

Mrs. Bentley : Not likely I'm going to waste good victuals for nothing ! Well, I only hope he'll come back with some sense in that beautiful head of his, and set his mind to earn a living in a respectable way.

Tom (indignantly) : Sense ! John has more sense than anyone I know.

Mrs. Bentley : Then why don't he give up his poetry and rubbish and go back to the good honest doctoring trade he was brought up to ?

Tom : Because he's been working at nothing else for the last two years but to fit himself to write poetry—*great* poetry, Mrs. Bentley.

Mrs. Bentley : Tell that to the Marines ! It's all been wrote long ago.

Tom : But Wordsworth . . . and Coleridge . . . and Byron—and this new Mr. Shelley—

Mrs. Bentley : You don't count *them*, I hope ! Why, they're not even dead yet !

Tom : Mrs. Bentley, I tell you I'd stake my whole life and fortune—if I had any—on John . . .

Is stopped by a fit of coughing.

Mrs. Bentley (coming to him) : There, there, don't you put yourself about so. I was only repeating what the gentleman in *Blackwood's Magazine*—

Breaking off and clapping her hand to her mouth.

Tom : The new *Blackwood*? Has it come out? Have you got it? (*Seizing her hand*) Dear Mrs. Bentley, pray, pray bring it to me at once. (*As she shows visible hesitation*) If you don't I swear I'll go and get it myself.

He looks so ready to carry out his threat that MRS. BENTLEY yields reluctantly, and goes into the kitchen off up left. TOM sits up in his chair, his usually pale and passive face flushed with eagerness; and as Mrs. Bentley returns he almost snatches the magazine out of her hands. He opens it where the page is turned down, and begins to devour the article.

Mrs. Bentley : Bentley was on his rounds with the post yesterday, and a lady gave him the *Blackwood* because there was this bit in it about Mr. John—but I'm sure my husband never meant you should see it, though he don't take much stock in poetry himself. (*Pauses.*) It's about this *En-dy-my-on* he's just brought out, isn't it?

Tom : Yes . . . no . . . yes . . . (*Reading on,*

then bursting out) "Johnny Keats!" He was never called "Johnny" in his life!

Mrs. Bentley: It's not the worst thing they've called him, by all accounts.

Tom: The fellow bids John—*John!*—go back to his plasters and pills—

Mrs. Bentley: Why, I've told him that myself many a time!

Tom: You never said that it was better to be a starved apothecary than a starved poet—

Mrs. Bentley: The impudence of it! To talk of anybody starving in *my* house!

Tom: You never knocked him down at one blow—and then kicked him—and then trampled on him—

Mrs. Bentley: God forbid!—and I'd like to see the man who'd try it. I shan't forget that butcher boy's face after Mr. John had fought him for tormenting our cat.

Tom: John was a terrible fighter at school—he'd square up to people twice his size . . . but this is different. He can't hit back here, and they know it. (*Sitting upright with sudden vigour*) Mrs. Bentley, I'm going to get up.

Mrs. Bentley: I'll see you do no such thing! The doctor said—

Tom: If John's got to meet this dastardly, cowardly attack I must be ready to meet it with him. John shall see he's got a man to stand by him.

Getting to his feet, and standing holding on by the mantelpiece.

Mrs. Bentley : You a man ! Why, I never see such a family. You and John and that George that's gone to America, you hold together just as if you was all twins !

Tom : No more fireside supper for me ! (*Trying to walk to a chair by the table, but has to accept Mrs. Bentley's arm*) *Mrs. Bentley,* if John should come don't tell him how ill I was on Sunday.

Sitting in the chair above the table right of centre.

Mrs. Bentley : No, that I won't. (*Turning away*) No need to tell him !

Tom : Leave me alone now. I must think what to do.

Leaning back with closed eyes.

Mrs. Bentley : As if you could do anything, poor lamb !

Trying to get the magazine surreptitiously away from him, but he resists.

Tom : No, no . . . I'm going to hide it—and—

yes . . . Mrs. Bentley, could you get a message to Mr. Leigh Hunt to come here at once?

Mrs. Bentley: I might—if Bentley hasn't gone down to the Black Bull yet.

Tom: You'll be sure not to forget? (*There is a knock at the front door. Thrusting the "Blackwood" behind his cushions*) Run! Run and let him in——

Mrs. Bentley: Bless your heart, Mr. John wouldn't come knocking at my door, I should hope. (*Crossing and looking out of the window*) I do believe it's that nice young lady that came to see you before—Miss Fanny Brawne——

Tom: I couldn't possibly see her to-day, Mrs. Bentley.

Mrs. Bentley: Oh, yes, you can! She doesn't know Mr. John, thanks be!—and she'll take your mind off him for a bit.

She admits FANNY BRAWNE, a lively girl of eighteen, not unlike the youthful portraits of Queen Victoria—her blooming health and fashionable dress in strong contrast to poor Tom in his threadbare clothes.

Fanny: Good day, Mrs. Bentley. (*Coming to Tom on his right*) Well, Mr. Tom, and how are you to-day? I declare you've got quite a fine colour. Look—here's a nosegay from our own garden——

Putting the flowers into his hand.

Tom : Oh, Miss Brawne, I was just longing for some flowers ! This room is so bare . . .

Mrs. Bentley : Bare indeed !—with as fine a rush-bottomed set as you'd see in Hampstead !

Fanny (a little piqued) : So you're not at all pleased to see me, Tom ? Very well, I'll just arrange these, and then I'll leave you to enjoy them.

Moving up to the dresser for a bowl, then putting flowers in water.

Tom : Oh, but please don't go ! You see it wasn't for myself I wanted the flowers. It's for John. John is *passionate* for flowers !

Fanny : What odd expressions you use, Tom ! (*Moving down to the table, on left of same*) Is there nothing else John is passionate about ?

Tom (gazing at Fanny with unconscious admiration) : Oh, yes . . . everything beautiful excites him—and then, you see, it sometimes means a new poem.

Mrs. Bentley : More's the pity ! (*To Tom*) You'll excuse me, sir. I'll see if I can find Bentley.

Going out into kitchen.

Fanny : But I understood that your brother wouldn't be back from Scotland for several days—

Placing her scarf on the chair.

Tom : So I thought . . . but now I really do expect him this evening.

Fanny : And why this evening in particular ?

Tom (*naïvely*) : Because Miss Brawue and the flowers would both be wasted otherwise. You see, I'm just what Mrs. Bentley calls me—a half-burnt candle.

Fanny (*sitting down on chair left of the table beside him*) : Now, Mr. Tom, you mustn't talk like that. But you know I really do hope my flowers won't whip Mr. Keats into writing any more poetry.

Tom : You can't prevent it, Miss Brawne. No-one can prevent John writing—no-one but himself.

Fanny : Of course I don't know your brother, and I do know that it's a very great and glorious thing to be a poet—but not a *small* poet, Tom . . . just one of a little second-rate group—

Tom (*flushing*) : Miss Brawne, you've been reading that shameful article in *Blackwood*—yes, you have !—you can't deny it.

Fanny (*smiling at such needless vehemence*) : Well, then, I have. It was certainly an unfair attack—

Tom : Unfair ! (*Whipping the magazine out of its hiding-place*) Take it, ma'am ! I dare you to read me a single line that's true in the whole article.

Fanny : Why, Tom, I don't know you to-day ! (*Reading, then beginning to laugh*) I must own there's some wit in it—for after all your brother *was* a surgeon's apprentice, wasn't he ?

Tom : Read it !

Fanny (reading aloud—still amused) : “ Whether Mr. John had been sent home to some patient far gone in the poetical mania we have not heard, but this much is certain—that he has caught the infection, and that thoroughly. . . .” Well, it’s a little vulgar, certainly, but don’t you think it might be—salutary ?

Tom : Salutary ! (*Almost snatching the magazine from her*) Listen to this, then ! (*Reading aloud*) “ The phrenzy of the poems was bad enough in its way ; but it did not alarm us half as seriously as the calm, settled, imperturbable drivelling idiocy of *Endymion*——” (*Is seized with a fit of coughing.*)

Fanny (taking the magazine from him) : Tom, Tom, it isn’t worth making yourself ill over.

Tom (his indignation mounting) : He calls John “ an uneducated and flimsy stripling ” . . . he bids him go back to the shop——

Fanny : There, there, Tom, I agree with you. They ought to have spared him, if only on account of his youth.,

Tom (bristling) : John is full three-and-twenty, Miss Brawne.

Fanny : That’s not so very old for a qualified poet—and isn’t it almost as presumptuous to be an unqualified poet as an unqualified surgeon . . . which your brother certainly is not. Why, Tom, think of it !—he may yet rise to be a very eminent doctor.

Tom (with intensity): Miss Brawne, if I did not believe with all my heart and soul that John is destined to be a great poet I should despair of God and heaven!

Fanny: Nay, Tom, that's blasphemous——

Tom: It is all that he lives for. When I go John will have nothing but his imagination to sustain him.

Fanny: Now, now, Tom . . . you'll be well in a few weeks' time.

Tom: Oh, yes . . . (*Leaning back, his vitality exhausted*) Miss Brawne, do you think you could open that window?

Fanny: To be sure. (*Crossing to the window*) How stiff it is! I'm certain that good woman hardly ever opens it. (*Opening the window and leaning out, suddenly interested*) Oh, Tom, do look! Here's the oddest little figure of fun coming up the street. . . . Indeed, you'd think he'd walked straight out of Bedlam. Why, I declare he's coming in at the garden gate!

Tom (roused): In here! Who—what . . .?

The outer door is banged to.

It is . . . it must be . . .

A bird-like whistle is heard from the passage outside. Tom gets to his feet.

His call! . . . *John!*—John—come in!

FANNY draws quickly to one side above the window as JOHN KEATS appears on the threshold. He does indeed look the complete ragamuffin. His tanned skin, and curly hair escaping from under a very ancient fur cap, give him a gypsyish look; his coat is split up the back, and his shoes are past praying for. He has a staff in his hand and a worn plaid thrown over his shoulders. He goes to Tom quickly, and takes him in his arms with unashamed affection.

Keats : Dear Tom . . . dear, dear old Tom, tell me how you are? I've heard such things . . .

Putting TOM into his armchair by the fire, and kneeling beside him, taking his hand and looking into his face intently.

Tom : I'm better . . . I will be better—I promise you I will, John——

Keats : Your forehead is so hot . . . and your hands . . .

Tom : Mrs. Bentley made a fire in here fit to roast a pig. But, oh, dear, John, you look like—I can't tell what !

Keats : I left Brown in Scotland, or he'd have kept me in better order. But we've tramped it and starved it and wolfed it for the last two months, I can tell you. (*As Tom playfully snatches off his cap*) Now you've spoilt me even for a respectable vagrant !

Tom : There's a lady present, you know, John.

KEATS *leaps to his feet with such a look of horror that FANNY can hardly forbear laughing.*

Fanny (*coming forward*) : Indeed, I won't trouble you—I was just this instant going——

Tom : This is Miss Fanny Brawne, John—a kind friend and visitor of mine.

Fanny (*curtsying demurely*) : I assure you I've heard of you from Tom, Mr. Keats.

KEATS'S *eyes rest upon her for a moment with a peculiar falcon look, then he shrinks all at once into an awkward, bashful youth.*

Keats : No, pray don't go . . . you'll excuse me—I must speak to Mrs. Bentley . . . I'll be back in a moment, Tom—(*backing up left*) but please make my excuses . . .

Making a precipitate exit to the kitchen.

Tom : Indeed, I must beg you to excuse John, Miss Brawne ; you see, he is not very used to female society. But what d'you think of him ? Don't you think he's very handsome ?

Fanny : Why, really I didn't notice—except his eyes . . . his eyes almost frightened me—I can't tell why——

Tom : But how did you think he was looking ?

Fanny (*laughing*) : Like a young eagle one moment—the next like a tramp ! But since he has fled from me into the kitchen I had better be going before I throw him into a fit.

Tom : Miss Brawne— (*Holding out the magazine*) Can you hide this somewhere ?

Fanny : It's Mrs. Bentley's, isn't it ? (*Thrusting it into a drawer in the dresser*) He'll never think of looking in there, I'm sure. But I do believe you make too much of his poetry, Tom.

Tom : Do I ? Good-bye, Miss Brawne.

Fanny : There ! (*Coming down*) You're offended.

Tom : Not with you, Miss Fanny—I couldn't be. (*Taking her proffered hand and looking up at her, he says, slowly and simply*) " A thing of beauty is a joy for ever . . . "

Fanny : Oh, Tom, you do say the silliest things !

She goes laughingly to the door, and rustles out into the passage, without noticing that she has left her scarf behind her.

Tom : Mrs. Bentley ! Mrs. Bentley !

MRS. BENTLEY *re-enters from the kitchen, bringing supper for two on a tray.*

Mrs. Bentley : You needn't worry your head about the supper. I heard him come in. *Putting the hot dish and plates on the hob, then catching sight*

of the fur cap on the floor ; picks it up disdainfully, drops it into the fire, and goes to the kitchen door.)
Mr. Keats, sir ! There's a pitcher of hot water in the kitchen—you can take it up to your bedroom.

KEATS re-enters from the kitchen with the jug of water.

Keats : Bless your plump cheeks, Mrs. Bentley ! No more of your Scotch scaggies for me ! I can't abide females who show all their anatomy in their faces.

Mrs. Bentley : Get along with you and scrub your own face, Mr. John. It wants it.

Keats : Oh, that won't come off !—'tis a compound of three parts of Scotch mist to one of sun. Is that creature in petticoats gone ?

Mrs. Bentley : Fled at the first sight of you, Mr. John, and small blame to her ! And you needn't look for your cap either, for I've put it on the fire.

Keats : I thought I smelt something very like a roasted skunk. And there wasn't another like it in the whole of Scotland !

Mrs. Bentley : I should hope not indeed ! Now do go along, sir, and make yourself fit to be seen.

Keats (to Tom) : I'll not be long. (*As he passes Mrs. Bentley he gives her an impulsive kiss.*) For the care you've taken of Tom.

Exit up right centre.

Tom (moving to the table and taking grapes from his plate) : Put these on John's plate, Mrs. Bentley—

Mrs. Bentley : Now, Mr. Tom, you know the doctor said you was to have grapes every day—

Tom : But not every night—and John will enjoy them so. Mrs. Bentley, I'm still wondering why he came back so early ?

Mrs. Bentley : It wasn't Miss Fanny Brawne as brought him, anyway.

Tom : No, indeed . . .

Mrs. Bentley : Now, then, what are you smiling to yourself about ?

Tom : I was just thinking how John could be so awkward with such a lovely visitor.

Mrs. Bentley : Lively, you mean.

Tom : I think her lovely . . .

Mrs. Bentley : Ah, well, you haven't seen much, have you ?

Tom : I wasn't afraid of her. Were you, Mrs. Bentley ?

Mrs. Bentley : Not me ! But I look a bit more respectable than Mr. Keats, thank the Lord ! You wait till your brother falls in love, Mr. Tom. That'll teach him how to behave—or if it don't the young woman will. There, now, did I tell you ? Bentley's gone for Mr. Hunt.

Tom : Hunt ! I forgot I'd sent for him. Mrs. Bentley, we can't have him in here to-night.

Mrs. Bentley : Well, of all the cool things ! And what am I to say to him, if you please ?

Tom : Tell him the truth. I won't have John disturbed with this devilish attack of *Blackwood's* to-night.

Mrs. Bentley : Well, I never ! Anybody'd think you was John's guardian.

Tom : The whole of England should be John's guardian. Will you please give me those flowers, *Mrs. Bentley* ?

MRS. BENTLEY brings him the bowl, and he begins to rearrange the flowers with loving care.

Mrs. Bentley : Now where's the sense of taking all that trouble ? Stands to reason a hungry man isn't going to bother his head about a twopenny bunch of flowers.

KEATS is heard outside, whistling.

Well, he's not been long at his looking-glass.

KEATS enters, still in his disreputable coat, but with his plaid discarded, and a tidy pair of shoes. With his broad-browed Greek head and fine nervous features, shaded by thick hair of a golden-brown and lit by brilliant hazel eyes, his appearance would be arresting anywhere, in spite of his small stature. His first act is to

seize on the bowl of flowers and carry it off to the window, where he seems to devour it with his gaze.

Keats : Never talk to me of your Scotch heather again !

Mrs. Bentley (bringing the dish and plates to the table) : I shall talk to you of English beef-steak, sir, if you don't come and eat it while it's hot.

KEATS laughs, draws up a chair right of the table, and sinks luxuriously into it.

Keats : Oh, my poor anatomy !—how long is it since it felt a down cushion ? Tom—dost remember what Quince said to *Bottom* the Weaver ? . . . Go away, Mrs. Bentley—this is not for female ears.

Tom : I don't know my Shakespeare as well as you do, John.

Keats (in a loud whisper) : " Bless thee, Bottom ! Bless thee ! thou art translated."

Mrs. Bentley : Mr. John, you've come back right-down ribald !

Keats : Clothes, Mrs. Bentley, have a remarkable effect on the character. Since I acquired this yawn in my back I have taken to the most disreputable language.

Mrs. Bentley : Here—just give me that coat and I'll put a stitch in it before I'm a day older.

Helping him off with his coat and carrying it off to a seat by the fire and setting to work on it, while KEATS applies himself heartily to the food—TOM taking a languid mouthful now and then. After a moment KEATS looks up.

Keats : Well, Tom ?

Tom : Well, John ?

Keats : Isn't it strange how when one has a thousand and one things to say one can't utter a word ! Tom—you begin.

Tom : Oh, but a sick man has no news. I want to hear all your adventures, John.

Keats : And now I'm home I don't want to tell 'em. I want to forget those black, lowering mountains, those tramps through bogs, wet to the skin, those huts filled with smoke and beds filled with—what mustn't be mentioned before Mrs. Bentley.

Mrs. Bentley : Get along with you, Mr. John !

Keats : Oh, I shall get along very well now, thank you ! This one hour is worth the whole of three months' travels. You, Tom . . . and the fire . . . and Mrs. Bentley sitting there sewing—is a heaven that I'd die on the spot to perpetuate !

Tom : And the flowers and the grapes, John—

Keats : They have a separate sphere of their own ; they don't live with the domesticities. (Contemplating the grapes thoughtfully) There is

some word for that bloomy softness on their globes—and I can't find it.

Tom : "Bloomy" is good——

Keats : Not good enough ! It rhymes with "gloomy," and spoils my heaven. Now watch——
(*Throwing his head back and holding up the bunch*)
This is the way to eat a grape . . . Cool as a well ! My throat feels better already.

Tom (*alarmed*) : Your throat, John ?

Keats : Oh, just a soreness I've had for the last few weeks——

Tom : Was *that* what brought you home so much earlier than you intended ?

Keats : Yes, yes—but it's nothing to worry about now that I am back in the sun again. And it was no earlier than I *wanted*, Tom. I don't believe I could have spent another week away from news of you.

Mrs. Bentley : Here's your coat, sir. (*Handing it to him*) Why didn't you tell me you was sitting in a draught ?

She shuts the window, clears away the plates, and goes into the kitchen. With a sly glance at TOM, KEATS instantly crosses and opens the window again.

Tom : Bless you, John ! You bring the fresh air in with you.

Keats : I fear I was altogether too breezy with

your lady visitor—but to tell truth, Tom, I'm never at my ease with women of the finer sort. One can't talk to 'em as if they were men, for they understand but little of the great creative arts—and yet they seem to be always making some super-exalted claim on one, merely on the score of being women—and it's damned uncomfortable, Tom!

Tom : That's because you set them up as a kind of ideal creature. You never will come to grips with the real article.

Keats : Tom, I sometimes think you are years older than me. But I have no wish to come to grips with Miss Fanny Brawne.

Tom : Oh, John, I was hoping she'd inspire you with a sonnet.

Keats : She's beautiful—yes . . . but on the whole she repels me. (*Moving across to the window.*)

Tom (oracularly) : Give me a good sound hatred at the start—

Keats : I think I shall never marry . . . unless I can take all nature as my wife, and the stars for my children. (*Pointing into the growing dusk outside*) There's your sonnet, Tom! Have you ever remarked how beautiful the colour of lamplight shows against the first dove-grey of evening?

Tom : Couldn't you make a poem on it now, John?

Keats : I'm most vilely out of practice with rhyming! For days past I've thought of little

but the next inn and the next meal. Poets should be disembodied, Tom, or have nothing but a tiny feathered frame like a bird to look after.—A bird, Tom—think of it! (*Crossing to Tom*) I should have flown to you from Scotland by the Great Aërial Way, and come and perched on the arm of your chair—so! (*sitting on the arm of Tom's chair*) and sung to you. . . .

Tom (putting a hand over his): Sing to me now. . . .

KEATS pauses for a moment, then repeats in his low and beautifully modulated voice:

Keats: "Shed no tear—O shed no tear!
The flower will bloom another year.
Weep no more—O weep no more!
Young buds sleep in the root's white core.
Dry your eyes—O dry your eyes,
For I was taught in Paradise
To ease my breast of melodies—
Shed no tear."

Tom: I like that . . . it's new to me.

Keats: I heard a bird sing it one day—that's what put it into my head just now.

Tom: "The flower will bloom another year." . . .

Keats: Tom . . .

He is silent for a moment, almost unbearably affected.

Tom : John—your poetry . . . don't mind what anyone says—hold to it, John . . . *

Breaking off in a violent fit of coughing, which leaves him exhausted.

Keats : Mrs. Bentley ! Mrs. Bentley !

MRS. BENTLEY *enters*.

Isn't there anything he takes ?

Mrs. Bentley : Bless you, yes, sir—I'll get it.

Exit.

Keats : Let me raise your cushions, Tom. . . . There, is that better ?

MRS. BENTLEY *returns with medicine*. KEATS *on his left administers it, and TOM sinks back as if tired out*.

Mrs. Bentley : Don't you worry, sir. He often gets like that towards evening.

Tom : I think I could sleep a little . . .

Keats : Let me take you up to bed.

Tom : Presently . . . when I'm rested. Let me sit by the fire.

KEATS *and* MRS. BENTLEY *help him to his chair*.

I wouldn't read it to-night—not if I was you—— .

Keats : Blackwood ! So the murder's out. They polished off Leigh Hunt last time—'tis *Johnny Keats's* turn now. But I hope they'll have something kind to say of my *Endymion*. . . .

Begins reading.

Mrs. Bentley : Shall I bring you a candle, sir ?

Keats : No . . . it is light enough for *this*.

Moving over to the window.

MRS. BENTLEY *lights candles.*

Mrs. Bentley : I always did say as your taking up with Mr. Leigh Hunt would do you no good. By what Bentley hears he's a terrible Radical, if he's nothing worse——

Keats : This is much more than a political attack. It strikes at the very roots . . .

Breaking off, scanning the rest of the article rapidly, then throwing the magazine down on the table.

Mrs. Bentley : I told Bentley not to bring it in. "It's good advice," I said, "but he won't like it."

Keats (with concentrated bitterness) : I told you just now that I was not yet fit to associate with

Spenser. My presumption is punished. But I shall take the lesson to heart. (*Going to the door*) I shall write no more verse henceforth.

Mrs. Bentley: And that's the most sensible thing I've heard you say yet, Mr. Keats.

Keats: You really think so?

Regarding her steadily for a moment, then going abruptly out.

Tom (starting up in his chair): I heard everything! Mrs. Bentley—he meant it!

Mrs. Bentley: And a good thing too! Now he'll go back to his surgery—and let's hope he'll make a better job of that. (*There comes a knock at the front door*) There's Mr. Hunt! I'll go and tell him not to come in.

Tom: Why, he's the one man I want to see—I must see——

Mrs. Bentley: Well, then, you won't see him to-night, for you're not fit for any more visitors.

Tom (feigning resignation): Very well; send him away.

MRS. BENTLEY goes into the passage and is heard speaking. LEIGH HUNT is seen passing the window.

Tom (exerting his feeble voice to its fullest): Mr. Hunt! Mr. Hunt!

Hunt (*looking in at window*) : Why, Tom, my lad—— .

Tom : That ignorant woman is trying to put you off. I want you . . . I must see you—at once, dear Hunt !

Hunt : Why, of course I'll come in.

Disappears, and a moment later is shown in protestingly by MRS. BENTLEY.

Mrs. Bentley : All I can say is—he's no gentleman ! (*Exit in high dudgeon to the kitchen.*)

LEIGH HUNT *shakes hands with TOM. He is at this time aged thirty-four—a handsome, vivacious fellow—at once vain and good-natured.*

Hunt : I heard a rumour Keats was come home——

Tom : He's out there—in the garden . . .

Hunt : My dear boy, I must go and welcome him at once.

Tom : No—wait. Mr. Hunt—tell me . . . what do you think of John's poetry ?

Hunt : Why, I've never made a secret of it that I consider some of his work the most promising in its kind since Milton.

Tom : Then look at that ! (*Pointing to the magazine on the table.*)

Hunt (his face darkening) : My dear fellow, I've seen it.

Tom : What do you think of it ?

Hunt : Think !—what every honest man thinks. It's enough to daunt a Shakespeare in mid-career—let alone a young, sensitive soul like Keats. You say he's but just come home. I only hope and trust he hasn't read it yet ?

Tom : Aye, but he has. He took it in that dreadful quiet way he has sometimes. He says he'll never write again—and I believe in my soul he meant it.

Hunt : What—is it possible ? Tom, we can't allow it ! It would be a loss to the whole of literature—to the whole world——

Tom (gripping his hand) : Bless you for those words, Hunt !

Hunt : My dear lad, you must use every means in your power to persuade him——

Tom : I could never do for him the tithe of what you could.

Hunt : Hem . . . I hope it's not any question of money ? You see, I can't pay my own debts—and Keats is so cursedly generous, I still owe him the half of what he lent me. . . .

Tom : No, no, no—but you with your influence . . . your influence with John—your influence with the world of letters——

Hunt (well pleased) : My dear Tom, you overrate my influence . . . but naturally all the little

I have is at your brother's service. (*Walking up and down, considering*) Yes, yes—let me see . . . I might write a counterblast in the *Examiner*—

Tom : Write it this very night !

Hunt : Wait—it requires reflection and leisure . . . (*Meeting Tom's imploring glance*) My good fellow, don't you see that the very first thing is to save Keats from himself ? If you are really certain that you can do nothing with him—

Tom : I ! What can I do ?

Hunt : Say no more ! I'll speak to him at once. (*Warming*) It's a noble task, Tom—a glorious task ! It may mean the saving of the soul of a poet. (*As Tom gets weakly to his feet*) But won't you stay and reinforce my persuasions ?

Tom : No ; it is past my bedtime, and you'll see—I am best out of the way. (*Calling*) Mrs. Bentley !

MRS. BENTLEY enters.

I'm going up to my room now, Mrs. Bentley.

Mrs. Bentley (*with an indignant glance at Hunt*) : And quite time too !

Hunt : Nay, you mustn't chide us, Mrs. Bentley. We have a great bit of work in hand.

Tom : Save him ! The glory will be yours.

Wringing HUNT'S hand, and going out up right centre on MRS. BENTLEY'S arm.

HUNT *picks up the magazine, shakes his head over the article, then goes to the window and sits. A nightingale is heard from the garden.*

Hunt : Nightingales here too ! Keats should write a threnody to them. But it seems it is only the poets who are forbidden to sing in Hampstead. (*Leaning out of the window*) Keats ! Are you there ? Won't you come in and give me greeting ? (*Turning away, rubbing his hands complacently as he crosses to the door*) Now for it !

KEATS *enters. He looks very pale, but strangely tranquil.*

Hunt (*grasping his hand with emotion*) : My poor fellow ! My poor dear friend——

Keats : It was good of you to come. (*Looking round*) Where's Tom ?

Hunt : Gone to his room. (*As Keats makes a movement towards the door*) Mrs. Bentley was with him—he was quite easy. Wait a little and let him get to bed.

Keats : Yes, yes—but did you say he was easy ?

Hunt : Not coughing at all now—though I hope you'll not be with him too much——

Keats : Who else should be with him ?

Hunt : Oh, well—Mrs. Bentley, you know . . . excellent woman——

KEATS *shakes his head with a little smile.*

But I am not here to talk of Tom just now . . .
(*Placing a hand on his friend's shoulder*) My dear Keats, you must make an attempt to pull yourself together—you owe it to the world——

Keats : Indeed, I try to—but even as you speak this room seems full of Tom. He has lived here so long that it is impressed with his presence—as if it took the very form of his suffering——

Hunt : We are speaking at cross-purposes.
(*Taking up the magazine*) This incredibly insolent attack——

Keats (smiling a little) : Oh, that ! Yes, I confess to a sting at first——

Hunt : Say the barb of a poisoned arrow ! I have read this abominable article with an indignation I can't describe. It is enough to destroy any man's faith in himself.

Keats : Aye, it destroyed mine—for exactly five minutes.

Hunt : What's that ? Did you not say you would never write again ?

Keats : Did I ? What a piece of presumption on the part of the manikin Keats !

Hunt : Presumption !

Keats : If the divine spirit of poetry deigns to make use of a man what right has he to gainsay it ?

Hunt (hotly) : The divine spirit of poetry is outraged by such an article as this !

Keats : Then let me not be outraged along with

it. To be a man at all, Hunt, let alone a poet, one must learn to be independent of these bitter little gentlemen, the reviewers.

Hunt : Upon my soul, Keats, I don't understand you ! I was told you had had a knock-out blow from which you would hardly recover——

Keats : And so our kind Hunt proposed to himself to be surgeon-in-chief ?

Hunt : Man alive ! Doesn't this thing affect you at all ?

Keats : A very great deal—or a very little . . . according as you look at it. I own it was a bitter moment ; but since then I have had time to reflect.

Hunt : Ten minutes in the garden ! (*Allowing some mortification to appear in his voice*) Ah, well, I must confess I thought you would look on it very differently. I came here fully prepared to take up the cudgels on your behalf—but it seems you are so independent you don't want the help of even your best friends. (*Turning away rather pettishly.*)

KEATS comes quickly to him, and slips an arm through his.

Keats : You mistake me completely ! I need you—all my friends—a thousand times more than ever in my life before. (*Lower*) But, Hunt, you will understand. I have been with Tom this evening for the first time for many weeks . . .

I carried him in spirit with me into the garden yonder—his poor changed face—his voice—his eyes . . . and when I reflect on *that*—then the petty jeering of *Blackwood* seems a very trifling thing in comparison.

Hunt (turning cordially to his friend, and taking both his hands): You are in the right, Keats! I apologise for my foolish temper. I ought to have known better the kind of man you were.

While HUNT is speaking FANNY BRAWNE has entered through the open front door, and come quietly into the doorway up right centre.

Keats: Miss Brawne!

His eyes rest upon her with a kind of unwilling admiration.

Fanny: Forgive me for disturbing you with Mr. Hunt. I only came back for the scarf I left behind. . . .

Hunt: So you've made the acquaintance of my young friend here, Miss Fanny? A great little man, I assure you—and perhaps to be greater some day—eh, Keats?

Keats: You can scarcely expect Miss Brawne to subscribe to that, Hunt. You don't know how I behaved this afternoon. . . .

Fanny (with demure mischief in her eyes): In-

deed, I'd not have come back to embarrass Mr. Keats again, but that I took flight so hastily the last time——

Keats : It was I who fled, Hunt, believe me——

Hunt : Oh, I can quite well believe you! I know your barbarian habits.

Keats : I have regretted them since, I assure you. Here is your scarf, Miss Brawne—— (*Holding it out to her.*)

Hunt : Oho! I wondered where the good Bentley had found such a rainbow adornment. Nay, then, Keats, you must put it on the lady with your own hands, like a gallant little poet. . . . Heavens, man! don't blush and fumble as if you had never done such an office before. And now, if Miss Brawne will allow me, I'll take my leave. My further assistance can scarce be needed in such lovely company.

Keats (embarrassed) : No, but indeed, Hunt——

Hunt : No, but indeed, Keats, I will *not* play the knight-errant and rescue the distressed poet from the fair damsel. I leave you to—*La Belle Dame Sans Merci*.

Bowing with a flourish to FANNY, and exit up left centre.

Keats: La Belle Dame Sans Merci . . .

Fanny : Meaning poor little Fanny, I suppose? Don't you think he's a very hard judge, Mr. Keats?

Keats (with great simplicity) : Oh, no ! I was only wondering where he got such a phrase for a poem . . .

The nightingale is heard singing in the garden.

Fanny : I declare that's Tom all over ! (*Looking at him consideringly*) And yet you're not so very like him neither. There's a kind of power about you . . . when you spoke of La Belle Dame—I forget how it goes !—you seemed inspired. Though heaven knows you can have little enough to inspire you here in Hampstead in this dull room, with your poor sick brother for company——

Keats : Don't you hear ? There are nightingales outside.

Something in the words captures FANNY'S imagination. She comes impetuously to KEATS.

Fanny : Mr. Keats, I believe I did you a great injustice this afternoon. Will you forgive me for having thought of you as merely—a little poet ?

Keats (gazing at her with rising admiration) : Forgive you, Miss Brawne ? No, a thousand times——

Fanny : No !

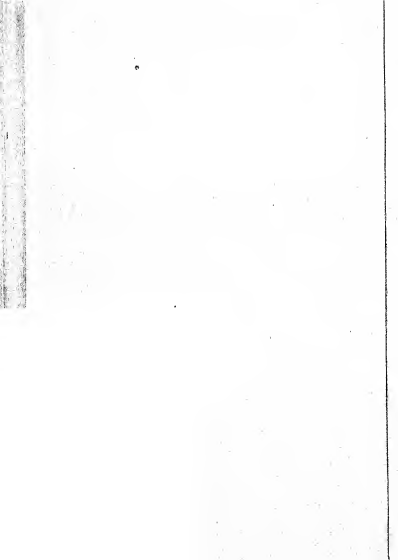
Keats : It would be the greatest presumption of my life. (*With intensity*) Miss Brawne—I felt but

a short while ago that this was doomed to be the blackest day of my existence. Poor Tom's state, which haunts me still . . . and then this savage attack in *Blackwood*—I can own it now—it was a blow that shook me to the soul. But Tom—my dear Tom—has shown me that a man must face worse things than critics; and now you—*(Pauses, then says with emotion)* I think indeed you have been sent to inspire me!

Fanny: Believe me, I would be your friend most willingly—*(As Keats kisses her hand ardently)* But isn't this a very impetuous friendship, Mr. Keats?

Keats: Forgive me . . . I could not help myself. It came to me that you were giving me something I could never repay. . . . *(He adds with a sudden eager lift of the head)* And yet I sometimes think I shall be among the English poets after my death. . . .

The curtain comes down as he stands gazing out into the future.



THE HOOSE O' THE HILL

BY

,

JOE CORRIE



THE drama here is tense and perhaps occasionally verges on the melodramatic. But the play is remarkable for its effective opening which gets the real business of the story going at once. Notice, however, how it commences with apparently one impending climax, the uncertain fate of Andra Fergusson, how this is really a skilful economy and gives the audience the essential facts of the story. Then observe how interest is maintained by the narrative climbing rapidly from one crisis to another, and how when the real purpose of the play is made clear it hurries forward to its terrible and final solution. There is almost a touch of the macabre about this ending.

The dialect form here has a beauty of its own which is not to be recaptured by any translation into formal English. There is, too, an intensity of passion in some of the speeches which gives them a cadence akin to the melody of verse.

The staging can be achieved quite simply, a practical door, a window frame, very simple furniture suggesting an almost primitive hut, with an open and practical hearth easily constructed from timber laths and canvas, are all that are required.

Note when studying the play that the dramatist has succeeded in contrasting to a certain extent the characters of Agnes and Nan, and that while the

Captain and the Sergeant remain only sketches there is a sharply defined difference between them. As a character Andra Fergusson never appears, but we learn much of what kind of man he must have been from what others in the play have to say about him.

The historical background, the picturesque costumes, the moving cadence of the language and the strong dramatic element in the story all unite to make it a play well worth presenting before almost any type of audience.

Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to MESSRS. SAMUEL FRENCH, LIMITED, 26 SOUTHAMPTON STREET, LONDON, W.C.2., OR 25 WEST 45TH STREET, NEW YORK.

CHARACTERS

AGNES FERGUSSON	}	<i>Mother and Daughter.</i>
NAN FERGUSSON		
ROBIN GALBRAITH,		<i>an Old Man.</i>
CAPTAIN RAE	}	<i>of Lag's Horse.</i>
SERGEANT WILSON		
TROOPER BROWN		

TIME : *about 1700.*

The scene is the kitchen interior of a shepherd's cottage amid the grey hills of Galloway, near the Glen of Trool. The furnishings are scant and of a gloomy appearance. At the back is the door that leads out to the wild stretch of country; to the right of it is a small window through which can be seen the Merrick range of hills in the misty grandeur of gloaming.

The peat burns brightly in a low fireplace at left. Two old three-legged stools, three chairs, and a table occupy the floor. At right is an old dresser.

At rise of curtain Agnes, who sits looking wearily into fire, rises and goes to window. For a brief space she gazes out on the scene, then returns and sits at the fire again.

NAN enters from outside. She is a lass of nineteen, tall and strong. She is pale, and looks like one who has either been weeping or has been denied sleep.

At sound of door opening AGNES turns quickly.

Agnes : Nae sign o' him yet, Nan ?

NAN shakes head despairingly.

He'll never come hame.

She breaks down, and buries head in hands.

Nan : Wheesht, Mither ! He nicht come hame when the darkness comes doon : the sodgers are scoorin' the hills yet.

Agnes : He'll never open the door again, Nan—he's awa'—and tae think he's lyin' oot on the cauld hill and nae yin near him. . . .

She breaks down again. NAN goes to window and looks out. AGNES recovers, and while she gazes into fire a proud light enters her eyes.

Ye were mebbe jist a 'herd, Andra, but ye hae gane tae your Maker wi' a croon on your heid that kings'll never wear—and I'm prood o' ye this day. (*She rises like a queen*) Aye, I'm prood o' ye this day. And may the curse o' a broken he'rt fa' heavy on the heid o' Lag and every hound that serves under him. Licht the candle, Nan lass, and sit ye doon at the fire. Ye maun be cauld, for ye hae lain oot on the bare hillside the hale day.

Nan : My faither'll come hame—he was ower guid a man tae dee at the hands o' Lag and his redcoats.

NAN proceeds to light candle at fire.

Agnes : Be prood, Nan, that ye had a faither who was prepared tae gi'e his life for the Covenant. In years tae come when folk are spittin' on the graves o' Sir Robert Grierson and his noble kind they'll seek the path up the hill and say tae the hale wide world, "Here lies Andra Fergusson frae the Hoose o' the Hill, a 'herd who gaed his life for the Covenant." Is that no' something tae be prood o', Nan?

Nan : I'm prood enough tae, Mither, but I'd rather see him comin' in the door. Hoo will we spend the lang winter nights if he doesna come hame tae us?

She goes to window and looks out. It is nearly dark.

Agnes : Hing a clot on the winda, Nan. He'll need a licht nae mair tae guide him hame frae the hill. It's a sair thocht—but I'm prood for a' that.

Nan (angrily) : Hoo can ye be prood, Mither, and him was aye sae guid and kind?

Agnes : He wears the croon, Nan.

Nan : Then God canna hae much cause tae be prood, for He maun be seein' the bluid on the hills, and He's lettin' it gang on: if He was a guid God and a kind God He wad tak' the pairt o' His followers, and no' see them bein' hunted wi' fire and steel, like wild beasts.

Her speech has some effect on AGNES, for she sits down again. NAN looks out window.

Here's auld Robin Galbraith comin', Mither—but I doot he has nae guid tidin's, he's comin' gey weary.

AGNES remains motionless. NAN awaits the coming of ROBIN anxiously. He enters, an old man, rather bent. He keeps his eyes on the floor. NAN clutches his arm impatiently.

Where's my faither, Robin ?

ROBIN keeps his eyes on the broken AGNES, and does not speak for a little.

Robin : Agnes !

Nan : Tell me—tell me—where's my faither ?

Robin (unheeding Nan, and with his eyes still on Agnes) : Puir lass, it's a sair weicht that has fa'n on ye this nicht, and I'm vexed for ye frae the bottom o' my he'rt.

NAN, all hope now gone, sits down and weeps bitterly.

Robin : Aye, there's no' a he'rt within sicht o' the Merrick but is sair this nicht, for we a' respected Andra.

Agnes : When will they be bringin' him hame.
Robin ?

Robin : We canna bring him hame, lass ; we'll need tae bury him on the hill in the deid o' the nicht. (*Straightening himself*) Oh, Lord, hae pity on your faithfu' sons and guard them frae the unbelievers : let nae mair o' them be ta'en, for the hill burns are red wi' their bluid.

There is a pause. The crying of a whaup can be heard.

Agnes : Did he open his mooth ava, *Robin* ?

Robin : Never a word, lass, never a single word, though they tortured him gey sair tae tell. (*Agnes hides eyes with hands, as if to shut out the sight.*) "Where is Jeemes Renwick ?" was their cry, but he tellt them nae mair than the echoes o' the hills where Renwick sleeps. Syne they put him up against a crag, and—and—— Oh, God!—the kindest and the best man in the hale o' Gallowa'. (*Putting hand on Agnes's shoulder*) *Agnes*, ye hae every richt tae be prood—but you'll miss him sair. A guid-he'rted man was Andra, and as true as steel. Aye, he'll be a sair-missed man in the Glen o' Trool : a kind word for everybody had Andra. But he wears the mairtyr's croon, lass ; he wears the mairtyr's croon. Aye, aye. But I'll need tae be gaun, guid folk. The redcoats are still in the glen, and gin I was ower late on the

road they micht speir mair than wad be guid for me. Strength tae ye, lass. Ye maun bear up, and it's little ony o' us can dae for ye. But the Lord'll strike heavy yet, Agnes, "The Lord shall repay," says the guid book, and we may leive to see the day. There's never a nicht but I pray for vengeance, and when the day comes may their rotten he'rts be devoured by the carrion and their souls roast in hell! Guid nicht! and the Lord bless ye baith. (*He goes out.*)

Agnes : Bar the door, Nan, and shut oot the world, for it's little comfort it can bring tae us noo.

NAN is about to bar the door when a commotion is heard outside. Both women are startled. While they stand listening a loud knock comes to the door.

Wha's there?

Captain : Open the door, and speir less questions.

Nan (terrified) : It's Lag's men.

AGNES opens door. ROBIN is thrust in, followed by the CAPTAIN, SERGEANT, and TROOPER.

Captain : Is this ony freen' o' yours?

Agnes : No, that's auld Robin Galbraith frae the clachan.

Captain : What was he dain' here at this time o' the nicht? Come on, noo, oot wi't! We're no' wantin' ony damned nonsense.

Agnes : He was—he was jist ower seein' us.

Captain : And dae ye think we're gaun tae believe that story? Pit the bar on that door, Broon. I think we're on the scent at last. (*To Robin*) We'll, Robin Galbraith, if that's what they ca' ye, what dae ye ken o' this Jeemes Renwick wha is keepin' us sae lang amang thae stubborn hills, seekin' every neuk and cranny like a lot o' fules. Where is he? Oot wi't!

Robin : Supposin' ye gaed me a croon o' gold I couldna tell ye.

Captain : Ye wadna tell me, ye mean. But we're no' ha'in' ony damned nonsense. Broon! get a bit o' that red hot peat, and we'll see what he has tae say tae it.

Agnes : Hae pity on the auld man.

Captain : I'm hain' Renwick in Wigtown supposin' I hae tae burn every thack atween here and Castle Douglas. (*To Robin*) Oot wi' it! Or I'll burn your e'en oot o' their sockets.

Robin : Wi' my hand up tae God, I canna tell ye where he is.

Captain : Isn't this damnable wark! Oot wi' that peat, and we'll see wha's maister here.

Agnes : What wad ye say if someyin was tae burn *your* faither's e'en oot o' their sockets? Wad ye no' want tae choke the life oot the ane that

wad try it? This auld man has nae sons tae protect *him*, naething but his twa auld gnarled hands, and they're no' much guid against three big, strong men wi' muskets and steel.

Trooper : Damned guid, wife. And if there's ony burnin' tae be done someyin else can dae it.

Captain : Sergeant !

Sergeant : I'm thinkin' the same. We've done enough bloody wark for ae day.

Captain : Ye refuse to obey orders? D'ye ken the penalty?

Sergeant : There's a limit tae this kind o' wark, and I'm dain' nae mair o' it the day, penalty or no.

Captain : Broon! obey orders!

Trooper : No!

Captain : Are ye aware that there's a hunner guineas at stake? A hunner guineas for the heid o' that nowt Renwick, and him no' sae very far awa' frae your very nose at this meenit.

Sergeant : Ten hunner guineas wadna pay us for this day's wark.

Captain : It's Lag's orders that Renwick has tae be landed in Wigtown, deid or alive, and ye ken Lag as weel as I ken him. It wadna gi'e him twa thochts tae swing the hale damned three o' us tae the gibbet if he heard o' this cairry on.

Sergeant : And we'd deserve it if we touched yae hair o' that auld man's heid. It's true what the guid wife o' the hoose says, and I'm mindin' o' my ain faither.

Trooper : It's Wigtown we should be in at this time o' the nicht, onywey. We hae a' God's daylicht tae look for Renwick.

Captain : Very weel. But ye haena heard the last o' this. I'll mak' it damned hot for ye yet, mind I'm sayin' it. (*To Robin*) Robin, we'll be ca'in' in at the clachan the morn : Sir Robert Grierson o' Lag'll be wi' us, and he'll be askin' ye himsel' about this Maister Renwick, sae if ye think it better still tae keep your mooth shut ye better devote the nicht tae prayer, preparin' tae meet your God. (*To Sergeant*) Mebbe you'll obleege me by openin' that door tae let the puir auld innocent sowl oot.

Trooper opens door.

Thenk ye. There's the door, then, ye auld pig—and mind what I tellt ye aboot preparin' tae meet your God. And hae a guid peat-fire on, you'll be nane the waur o' a taste o' hell afore ye gang tae heaven.

ROBIN goes out.

Captain (to Trooper) : See him ower the dike. And see that thae horses are tethered for the nicht. (*To Sergeant*) Awa' and gi'e him a hand. And see that there's plenty o' strae ; we'll be sleepin' in that shed the nicht.

SERGEANT *and* TROOPER *go off.*

A hunner golden guineas, and mebbe tae let it slip oot in front o' my very nose ower the heid o' two fules that canna bide oot o' Wigtown for two nichts on end. But I'm gettin' Renwick. Aye, by God, I'm gettin' him, deid or alive. (*To Agnes, who is more engrossed with her own thought than the talk of the Captain*) Get a bite o' meat ready. We haena had a bite since midday. (*To Nan*) And you—get some peats for that fire!

Nan : Wha dae ye think you're speakin' tae?

Agnes : Dae as he says, Nan. (*Nan hesitates*) Like a guid lass. (*Nan goes out, giving Captain an ugly look.*)

Captain : Is there nae man in this hoose?

Agnes : No.

Captain : Deid?

Agnes : Aye.

Captain (*as Nan enters with peat*) : You'll hae nae whusky in the hoose, then?

Agnes : Aye—but wad ye no' be better o' something tae eat first? (*Nan shows surprise.*)

Captain : Are ye takin' oor visit freenly?

Agnes : You're mair than welcome. It's the lang nichts we spend up here, and we'll be glad o' your company.

NAN is about to rebuke AGNES, but she gets a look that makes her hesitate.

Captain : You're no' like the rest o' the folk we hae met in Gallowa' : they wad tear oor he'rts oot if they got the chance. But mebbe you're no' Covenanters ?

Agnes : Aye, we're Covenanters, but did Christ no' say, " Forgi'e your enemies " ?

Captain : There's no' mony Christians amang the Covenanters, then, for they're mair bluid-thirsty than the warst o' Lag's troopers : they think nocht o' lyin' ahint a dike and shootin' in cauld bluid. Nae wonder they're shown little mercy when we dae get them. They hae themsel's tae blame for it. Na, there's no mony o' *your* kind o' Covenanters.

Agnes : Gentle and semple, godly or ungodly, are never turned awa' frae the Hoose o' the Hill.

Captain : Renwick himsel' mebbe comes here ?

Agnes : Mebbe.

Captain : Eh ?

Nan : Mither !

Captain : Will there be ony chance o' him comin' here the nicht ?

Agnes : He nicht : ye never ken.

Captain : I suppose ten or fifteen guineas wadna gang wrang wi' ye. You'll hae a bit o' a fecht up here tae keep yoursel's in a bit o' meat, seein' there's jist the twa o' ye ?

AGNES makes no answer. NAN is nearly distraught.

Captain : If I was tae mak' it twenty wad it be nearer your 'ikin' ? What could ye no' dae wi' twenty guineas, noo ? Ye could mak' yoursel's richt for life up here, richt till the end o' your days, guid wife, and naebody wad be ony the wiser— independent, and nae need tae work frae daylight tae dark. What say ye ?

Nan : Mither !

CAPTAIN looks at NAN, and is certain that he is on the right track.

Captain : Twenty gowden guineas in your hand, and naeyin ony the wiser—you'll never get a chance like it a' your life. And noo that I ken, I'll hae him whether you help me or no'. You'll be a fule, guid wife, if ye dinna tak' the chance.

Agnes : But he micht no' come here again.

Captain : I'll gi'e ye the twenty guineas and tak' the risk o' that. (*He counts out the guineas on the table.*) What could ye no' dae wi' that, noo ? Dae we say ye tak' them ? A' you'll need tae dae is tae slip oot tae the shed where we'll be restin', and gi'e three cannie knocks on the door. Dinna be a fule, guid wife.

Pause.

Agnes : I'll dae it.

Nan : Oh, God hae mercy on us !

Captain (patting Agnes on shoulder): You're nae fule, onyway. I can see that. (*Rubs his hands.*)

Agnes: Are ye ready for your bite o' supper?

Captain: I am, and I'll enjoy it tae efter that wee bit o' business. God, but Lag'll be prood when I troop intae Wigtown wi' the man who has jouked a hunner wiser and aulder men than me. What can be keepin' thae nowts? Ye'd think they had a regiment o' horses tae stable.

He goes off humming a song.

Nan: O, Mither, hoo could ye?

Agnes: Wheesht! Say nocht: dae as they bid ye. Oh, the Lord has delivered them intae my hands this nicht. Gi'e me a he'rt o' steel—gi'e me the strength tae cairry it through.

Nan: You'll no' gi'e Maister Renwick intae their hands, Mither! Ye canna dae it! My faither wadna rest in his grave if he kent ye did sich a thing.

Agnes: Hide that money alow the stane at the door—quick!—get it oot o' sicht afore he comes back. And if ye should be left yoursel' in the mornin' speed as fast as ye can tae your Uncle John's in New Gallowa'.

Nan: But, Mither, ye canna .

Agnes: Dae as I tell ye, lassie, and ask nae questions.

NAN goes *reluctantly*. AGNES takes bottle from cupboard as NAN re-enters.

Let them eat and drink their fill. Aye, Lag'll be prood, my son, when ye troop intae Wigtown wi' Maister Renwick, and he'll hae muckle cause tae be prood. Nan——

Enter CAPTAIN with his men, and AGNES proceeds with their meal in silence.

Captain : Weel, guid wife, and are ye ready for us noo ? Whusky tae. (*Patting her on shoulder.*) There's no' mony o' your kind o' Covenanters. (*To troopers*) Sit ye doon ; though ye dinna deserve a bite, for your insubordination. Lag wadna need tae ken that I was sae saft wi' ye amang the hills, I doot.

Sergeant : Lag tak's damned guid care that he doesna spend the cauld nichts amang the hills.

Captain : Sit doon !

They sit and begin to eat. AGNES and NAN both sit at fire, each occupied with her own thoughts.

Trooper : I wonder wha yon was that we cam' on the day ?

Sergeant : He was a dour yin, and nae mistake.

Captain : Mair meat for the craws : nae wonder they're sae glossy and black aboot here.

NAN *would rise, but AGNES holds her down.*

Captain (filling himself a glass of whisky) : Here's short life tae Renwick, and a speedy return tae Wigtown. (*Fills up glass and hands it to Sergeant*) Here !

Sergeant : Hospitality like this and us gaun about the countryside murderin' and plunderin' and levellin' wi' fire. We dinna deserve it, guid wife. Here's tae ye, whaever ye be !

Captain : Here ! what's becomin' o' ye ? Ha ! I see ye slinkin' tae a conventicle yet wi' a Bible alow your coat."

Trooper : Did ye see hoo yon man kissed his Bible the day when we stuck him up against yon crag ? And hoo he looked up at the sky, syne looked doon and laughed at us ? God, but yon was courage.

Nan (who can bear it no longer) : Aye, there was mair courage in him than is in the hale o' Lag's dragoons !

TROOPERS *stare at her.*

Captain : Wha was the stubborn pig, that you're sae much concerned about him ?

Agnes : He was nae freen' o' oors. Nan went about his hoose whiles ; that's a' we kent o' him.

Captain : Aweel, you'll ken him nae mair. (*There is a pause, during which he looks suspiciously*

at Agnes. *She meets his stare. He rises.*) If I thoct there was ony underhand wark gaun on here the nicht I'd lock that door and licht the countryside wi' the flames o' your thatch.

Agnes : Are ye heedin' what a nervous lass has tae say ?

Captain : There's naeyin'll play Captain Rae false and get aff wi' it. (*Looks at her keenly.*) Na, I dinna think you'll risk that : it's Wigtown the morn wi' Renwick at oor heid, what say ye, guid wife ? Eh ? (*He sits.*)

Sergeant : You may catch the fox, Captain, but I doot if ever you'll catch Renwick.

Captain : Wait and see, Sergeant, wait and see : I haena been sleepin' since we cam' here the nicht. Wait till the morn, and see if we're troopin' intae Wigtown empty-handed.

Sergeant : Efter what happened the day it'll no' be the morn nor ony ither morn that you'll be troopin' intae Wigtown wi' the same Renwick ; there's as many holes in this pairt as there are rabbits, and every mooth is as ticht as the rocks o' Ben Yellary.

Captain (taking another glass of whisky) : There's sic a thing as a snare, Sergeant.

Sergeant : Aye, but they hae been set before, Captain, and Renwick's heid's no' in yet. Nor will a' the fire or steel o' the Croon get him, I doot.

Captain : There are sic things as jinglin' Geordies,

Sergeant, and twenty o' them are worth a' the fire and steel o' the Croon whiles.

Sergeant: The man wha gaed his life the day spat on your jinglin' Geordies, didn't he? Na, the day ye troop intae Wigtown wi' Renwick it'll be blue snaw.

Captain: I'll lay twenty guineas tae five o' yours that Renwick's in Wigtown jile before the sun sets the morn.

Sergeant (laying his money on table): There ye are. I wish I could aye mak' twenty guineas as easy.

Captain (to Trooper): You tak' care o' thae Geordies till the morn at sunset.

Trooper: My faither used tae say that there was naething like a dram for makin' a man throw awa' his siller.

Captain (looking at Agnes): Them wha tak' me for a fule are makin' a big mistake, d'ye hear that? And either Renwick's in Wigtown jile the morn or there'll be a bleeze on the hill. It's no' the first thatch I hae fired, and it wadna gi'e me twa thochts tae dae it again.

Sergeant: Ye better be carefu' wi' the fire, Captain; it has a wey o' spittin' back whiles.

Captain (rising in his wrath): Ye damned pig, if ye insult me I'll——

SERGEANT rises and faces him. They stand scowling at each other for a few seconds, and

then sit. There is a pause. A faint knocking comes to the window. NAN is stricken with fear; even AGNES has to use every effort to keep her seat.

(In whisper) What's that?

Agnes (rather loudly): It's only the wind shakin' the rose-bush against the winda.

They listen cautiously, but the sound is not repeated.

Get anither bottle oot o' the cupboard for the gentlemen, Nan. *(To troopers)* Draw roond the fire if ye hae dune, and mak yoursel' comfortable. I'll awa' tae the shed and see that ye hae plenty o' strae tae lie doon on.

Captain: Aye, sit roond the fire, and be damned thankfu' ye hae a captain that doesna keep up spite, or ye'd be lyin' amang the heather the nicht wi' naething abune ye but the cauld stars. Sit doon, though I hae a guid mind no' tae let ye hae a taste oot o' this bottle. *(To Nan)* Will I gi'e them a dram? D'ye think they deserve it? You're a bonnie lass tae, when a body gets a richt look at ye. I've seen the day when Captain Rae wad hae haen a pree at thae red lips afore this, but, ah, ah, ten years wi' a crabbit wife knocks the thocht o' weemin oot the heid. *(Filling up glass)* Come! Trooper—a sang! And here's tae the eternal

damnation o' every Covenanter. (*Drinks*) A sang !
ye damned nowt ! Did ye no' hear me speak ?
Or are ye like oor freen' the Sergeant here, half
trooper and half Covenanter ? A sang !

Trooper (rising) : I'll try it, though my throat's
gey dry yet.

Captain (filling up glass and handing it to him) :
Here ! and wish lang life tae Captain Rae, for you'll
miss the best freen' ever ye had a' your life when
he's awa' frae ye.

Trooper : Lang life tae ye, Captain ! (*Holds up
glass.*)

Captain : Get it ower and get on wi' the sang.

Trooper (singing) :

" As I was a-walking one morning in May
The little birds were singing delightful and gay,
Where I and my true love would often sport and
play,

Down among the beds o' sweet roses."

Captain (drinking) : Eternal damnation tae every
Covenanter !

Trooper :

" If I had gold and silver in bags running o'er
I'd part with all my money to the girl I adore,
I'd part with all my money to meet my girl once
more

Down among the beds o' sweet roses."

Captain (singing) : " Down amang the beds o' sweet roses——" Sergeant !—a sang !

Sergeant : I hae 'nae mind for singin' this nicht.

Captain (pouring out a glass of whisky and handing it to him) : Here t—a sang !

Sergeant : I've had plenty.

Captain (drinks himself) : Captain Rae t—a sang !
(*Rises unsteadily and sings*)

" There's cauld kale in Aberdeen,
And castocks in Strathbogie,
Where ilka lad maun hae his lass,
But I maun hae my cogie.
My cogie, sirs, my cogie, sirs,
I wadna want my cogie ;
I wadna gi'e my three-gir'd caup
For a' the queans o' Bogie."

Trooper (clapping hands) : Hear, hear, Captain !
Captain :

" There's Johnnie Smith has got a wife
That scrimps him o' his cogie ;
If she were mine, upon my life,
I'd dook her in a bogie.
My cogie, sirs, my cogie, sirs,
I wadna want my cogie ;
I wadna gi'e my three-gir'd caup
For a' the queans o' Bogie."

Trooper : Damned guid, Captain — damned guid !

Captain : A dram, a sang, and a bonnie lass, what mair can heaven send doon ? Come ower here, my Covenantin' beauty. Captain Rae maun hae a pree at thae bonnie red lips yet, or he'll no' sleep the nicht.

NAN makes to go outside. He overtakes her and kisses her as AGNES enters.

Agnes : Nan !—sit doon ! (*To Captain*) Hae you nae mair respect for yoursel', a sodger o' the King ! And it'll tak' mair than three cannie knocks tae wauken you I'm dootin'.

Captain (straightening himself) : Sergeant !—to bed !

SERGEANT and TROOPER rise and go out.

Three knocks—aye, three cannie knocks (*staggers*), three cannie knocks—and troopin' intae Wigtown in the mornin' wi' fox Renwick. There are some gey queer Covenanters. Twenty gowden guineas, guid wife—you'll be a lady, the lady o' the glen, eh ? If I thocht ye were playin' me false I'd—I'd— Look at me straucht in the e'en ! (*She meets his gaze unflinchingly.*) You'll dae ; Captain Rae kens treachery when he sees it. Three cannie knocks, and Wigtown in the mornin' wi' the fox

at oor heid. There are some gey queer Covenanters, guid wife, eh?

Goes out singing "Down amang the beds o' sweet roses."

Agnes: Hoo did I bear tae hear their talk? Hoo did the he'rt no' burst oot o' my breist? Be carefu' wi' the fire, he said, it has a wey o' spittin' back. Aye, it has a wey o' spittin' back, and it'll spit back this nicht. Oh, God, steel my he'rt that I may hae the strength tae cairry it through. Nan, gether a' the strae ye can get thigither, and get ready tae cross the hills tae New Gallowa'.

Nan: What for, Mither?

Agnes: Dae as I bid ye, lassie! (*Nan goes out*) Renwick in Wigtown jile! It's three troopers that'll be in *hell* the morn's mornin'.

She goes to wall and takes down a small chain. She listens with ear to window. Enter NAN.

Nan: What dae ye mean tae dae, Mither?

Agnes: Wheesht! (*They listen*) Is that them intae the shed? (*Sound of door shutting.*) Aye, that's the door shuttin'. It's God's will. He has delivered them intae my hands this nicht. It'll be a bonnie sicht, the flames leapin' the heicht o' the sky. (*She steals out.*)

Nan (musingly) : The flames leapin' the heicht
o' the sky ? Lord save us, she mauna dae that !

NAN peeps through window.

Nan : She mauna dae it. Lag wad set every
thack in the glen on fire in the mornin' when he
kent o' it. She mauna dae it, Lag's men or no'.
Someyin'll be waitin' on them comin' hame.
(*Enter Agnes ; there is a wild light in her eyes.*)
Mither !—Mither ! ye canna dae it ! They're some
mither's sons.

Agnes : Nan, your faither lies cauld and deid on
the hill, and wha was it that tore the life frae his
breist ? *They* had nae pity, and God cries doon
for vengeance—"Vengeance is mine, saith the
Lord, I will repay !" —Oh, God, Ye hae been kind
tae me, Ye hae delivered them into my hands.
Wheesht ! Naething but the souch o' the wind
and the cry o' the whaup.

She goes out, returning with straw.

It'll burn like tinder. (*She listens, then goes out.*)

Nan : She maun be mad tae be thinkin' on sic
a thing. Lag wad hound us doon and show nae
mercy. It has been a sorry Covenant. Oh, God !
is it worth a' the sacrifice ? Is it worth a' the bluid
and tears that hae been shed ? Or are Ye only
laughin' at us ? Ye maun be, or Ye wadna aloo it

tae gang on. I maun stop her—their death-cries wad ring in my ears till my deein' day. (*Pause*) No!—no! even though they killed my faither I canna let her dae it. What's done is done, and canna be helpit noo; they're somebody's sons, somebody's sweethe'rts, and enough o' tears hae been shed a'ready. Oh, God! help me, help me! (*Enter Agnes; she goes for lighted candle.*) Mither! ye mauna dae it! They're somebody's sons, somebody's sweethe'rts!

Agnes (as if unaware of Nan's presence): Cauld and deid he lies on the hill; the heather waves red wi' his bluid. . . .

Nan: For the sake o' the Glen folk, Mither!—Lag'll show nae mercy.

Agnes: It'll be a bonnie sicht, the red flames leapin' up tae the sky—and the door's weel chained. There's some queer Covenanters, ye said. Aye, and queerer than ye thocht, my sodger laddie.

*She makes to go out with lighted candle.
NAN holds her from going.*

Nan: Mither!—Mither! hae ye nae he'rt?

Agnes (struggling): "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord, I will repay." It'll be a bonnie sicht, the red flames. . . .

She struggles to get free, and in the struggle the candle goes out; the only light is the red

glow from the fire. They struggle in silence; and NAN is gradually borne down, afraid of the madness of AGNES. She escapes, and shrinks to a corner. AGNES, her hair over her eyes, listens, then lights candle at fire.

(As she steals out) It'll be a bonnie sicht, the red flames leapin' the heicht o' the sky.

NAN goes to window and looks out. There is a short pause, then a burst of red flame lights up the window, then the mad laugh of AGNES.

Nan : Oh, Faither ! Faither !

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

COLOMBINE

1. Write an essay on "Romance would die if it wasn't for fighting. Romance is fighting."

2. Try to express in your own words what you think Colombine means when she says, "In the woods of home, hearts may thrill to the eloquent silences of the night. All the secrets of the world might be ours, did we but care to learn the simple language of the nightingale, etc."

3. Learn by heart the following poem by William Blake :

" Never seek to tell thy love,
Love that never told can be ;
For the gentle wind doth move
Silently, invisibly.

I told my love, I told my love,
I told her all my heart,
Trembling, cold, in ghastly fears :
Ah ! she did depart.

Soon after she was gone from me
A traveller came by,
Silently, invisibly.
He took her with a sigh."

THE QUAKER'S 'CELLO

1. "The essence of the English prose style at its best is the style of the English Bible." Discuss this with reference to the language of this play and with reference to the language of any other books you care to consider in this connection.

2. Sketch and colour a design for the costume of any one of the characters in the play.

3. Suggest details of the wigs or form of hair-dressing you consider necessary for each character in the play.

THE TALE OF A ROYAL VEST

1. Retell in the form of a burlesque mime, accompanying your script with instructions for appropriate movements, one of the various well-known nursery rhymes.

2. Write an essay on the origins of English drama.

3. Apart from the various soundings of trumpets, suggest a suitable musical setting for the play, with notes on a musical accompaniment, if you consider the latter desirable.

CAMILLUS AND THE SCHOOLMASTER

1. "The cities that men build express their minds." Discuss this view.
2. "To thine ownself be true——" Complete this quotation from *Hamlet*. How far is the spirit of it expressed in this play?
3. How far do you consider the ideals of a league of nations possible of achievement?
4. Write an essay on "The pen is mightier than the sword."

SAFE CUSTODY

1. Retell in your own dialect any story expressing unconscious rustic humour.
2. Suggest details for the dresses to be worn by the four female characters in the play.
3. Make a series of small plans showing the setting of the stage for this play. Indicate on these the proper positions for (a) the Postmistress and John Standfast when the play opens, (b) the Postmistress and Mary when the latter first enters the Post Office, (c) the Postmistress and Lady Mannerly when she first enters, (d) the Postmistress and the Unknown Woman. Add notes to your sketches giving details of the exact positions you wish the characters to take up, indicating whether they are to be standing, sitting, etc.

POET'S CORNER

1. "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever." Try to write an essay on this subject.

2. Make a list of biographical plays.

3. Attempt an appreciation of any one of Keats's poems.

4. Gather from the play all the relevant information you can concerning John Keats's appearance. Indicate in detail the correct make-up you consider the part requires.

THE HOOSE O' THE HILL

1. Which characters in this play are drawn in detail and which are merely sketches? Show how this is achieved in each case?

2. Make a list of other plays, not necessarily One-Act Plays, dealing with historical subjects. State briefly the nature of the subject dealt with in each case.

3. Copy out from the play all those passages referring directly to the character of Andra Fergusson. Write a short paragraph giving your interpretation of the man from the passages quoted.

GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. Suggest some reasons why the One-Act Play is so acceptable to the amateur dramatic society, and some reasons why the professional stage may have left it alone.
2. Which play contains the most dramatic incident? Describe the particular situation to which you refer.
3. Discuss the various factors which contribute towards a successful amateur dramatic performance.
4. Which character in all the plays in this volume do you consider to be drawn in the greatest detail? Show how this has been done.



The following pages have been provided for the benefit of those learning parts for dramatisation.

Notes and instructions given by the coach may thus be kept in the volume with the plays.